

TOVE



BENEFICE

ST LAWRENCE : TOWCESTER
ST MICHAEL : BRADDEN
ST AUGUSTINE : CALDECOTE
ST MARY : EASTON NESTON
ST BARTHOLOMEW : GREENS NORTON

Comprising

**St Bartholomew's Church
Greens Norton**



**St Michael's Church
Bradden**



**St Mary's Church
Easton Neston**



**St Lawrence Church
Towcester**



**St Augustine's Church
Caldecote**

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Introduction

The Tove Benefice is looking for someone to immerse themselves in all aspects of ministry in an active Benefice. As we enter a period of bringing together the many aspects of modern worship and of shaping and equipping our Benefice for the future, we look for someone to join us on this journey.

We are challenging ourselves to embody the Church of England's current strategies of providing 'an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new forms of Church' to our Benefice and to create a ministry that is 'simpler, humbler, bolder' (Church of England Vision 2022).

In September 2019, Reverend Paula Challen was appointed Rector, having been the Curate here since 2014. She began a review of management and leadership structures in order to establish a more cohesive and connected approach. Covid created the opportunity to establish the use of digital technology, which enabled us to continue to gather for both worship and meetings. In 2022, we began to use Zoom for Benefice PCC meetings, which we are looking to continue twice a year. There is still much more work to be done on this and, with the addition of new members of the Ministry Team, our approach will need further review and adjustment.

Coming out of the pandemic continues to bring challenges, especially a reluctance to volunteer and ageing congregations. From quite early on we established both daily and Sunday Morning Prayer services via Zoom. Even post-restrictions, a number of previously active church members have found the continuation of the Sunday morning service particularly important to them. The Readers and ordained clergy take it in turns to lead these services.

During 2021 the Ministry Team began to explore what the Church of England's Vision for the 2020s could look like within the context of the Benefice, but also within each of the parishes. The vision is: A Church for the whole nation which is Jesus Christ centred and shaped by the five marks of mission. A Church that is simpler, humbler, bolder, having three strategic priorities:

- To become a Church of missionary disciples where all God's people are free to live the Christian life, wherever we spend our time Sunday to Saturday.
- To be a Church where mixed ecology is the norm – where every person in England has access to an enriching and compelling community of faith by adding new churches and new forms of Church to our parishes, cathedrals, schools and chaplaincies.
- To be a church that is younger and more diverse.

We have sought to align consideration of this national vision in our Benefice with the review which began in 2019. It raises lots of questions about what it means to be simpler, humbler and bolder in all areas of the life of our churches. This is still very much work in progress and, importantly, we are taking it in incremental steps.

As our Rector passionately reminds us, worship and church are not limited to Sundays and, whilst our ASA figures have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, they only give one view. Our ministry with families, schools and nursing homes is ever growing and we are beginning to see green shoots through our intergenerational Family Worship.

Introduction to the Benefice

The Tove Benefice was created in March 2007 when the Parishes of Towcester with Caldecote and Easton Neston were joined with the Parishes of Greens Norton and Bradden. Towcester with Caldecote and Easton Neston parishes have been linked for many years although serving very distinct congregations. Bradden and Greens Norton have long established links and were included in a Benefice by a previous Deanery re-organisation. The current structure is confirmed in the Deanery plan and is unlikely to alter in the near future.

We have now been a Benefice for 15 years with the churches working together to continue to build the Kingdom as one Benefice. Our intention is always to work as a Benefice, to serve the community and to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord.

We are an outward looking Benefice, increasingly looking to raise our profile. We are also becoming known for the wider support that we provide. In 2021 we hosted pilgrims from the Camino to COP which in turn instigated a small group from across the Benefice to explore renewable and sustainable energy provision. Thanks to a feasibility study grant we were able to enlist the help of consultants, who produced a Benefice-wide recommendation report. This report is in the process of being reviewed and next stages set out.



Ukrainian Aid Collection

In March 2022, following a local request, we began to support the Ukrainian refugee efforts. Initially, this was with collection of aid which was taken to Poland and Ukraine for onward distribution. We collected and sent some 26 tons of aid gathered from the wider West Northamptonshire area. This was followed up with a van, driven by church members, took to a refugee centre in Poland. Our support of this refugee centre has continued and most recently, with the support of the wider community, we have funded an ambulance and filled a number of vehicles with essential medical supplies, which have travelled to Ukraine. As refugees have arrived in the UK, we have hosted two popular social events for host and guest families to get to know one another, one of which was fully funded by a generous donation.

Towcester is the oldest town in Northamptonshire and is surrounded by many beautiful rural communities. Although a mainly affluent part of the country with a low crime rate, there are pockets of rural poverty that are generally hidden and frequently forgotten. Towcester itself has a long and varied history, which is reflected in the many Grade 2 listed buildings on Watling Street, its main commercial centre. The town is expanding with major housing developments taking place.

Watling Street is now more commonly known as the A5 and Towcester is sited at its intersection with the A43. This makes the area an ideal place to settle with easy access to London, Birmingham, Oxford, Milton Keynes and the North. Both the M1 and M40 are within easy reach, as are main line rail services, which can be accessed from Northampton, Milton Keynes and Banbury. Although public transport to the villages is limited, many local inhabitants commute to London, Birmingham and Milton Keynes, whilst others work in a variety of small local industries and in farming. It is also ideally located for longer journeys with easy access to Luton, London Heathrow and Birmingham Airports.



Watling Street, Towcester

The community around the Benefice is well supported with three GP surgeries, two based in Towcester and one in Greens Norton and with private and NHS dental practices and two veterinary practices. Full hospital services are available in Northampton, Milton Keynes and Banbury and there are several local care and residential homes for the elderly.

Supermarkets serve the town and villages and Towcester has a Post Office and a variety of independent shops around the Market Square. 2021 saw the formation of the unitary authority West Northamptonshire Council, with offices based in Daventry, Towcester and Northampton. The offices in Towcester are at The Forum, which includes the Registry Office and is about 5 minutes walking distance from the town centre. Greens Norton has a busy village shop/Post Office and an independent butcher. Both Towcester and Greens Norton have public houses offering good food and a variety of entertainment. The most notable of these is probably the Saracen's Head Hotel in Towcester where Charles Dickens is said to have stayed and which is mentioned in "Pickwick Papers".

The surrounding countryside is used as pasture for sheep and cattle, with some arable farming, and it is criss-crossed by many foot and bridle paths. There are also extensive Forestry Commission woodlands around neighbouring villages and many interesting and beautiful properties including Easton Neston Estate, along with others belonging to the National Trust.

Towcester Racecourse has traditionally held both horse and greyhound races, but now only holds greyhound races. Just outside the Benefice is the Silverstone motor racing circuit, the highlight of which

is the British Grand Prix. Both organisations have a significant impact on the economy of the surrounding area. The community has active rugby, hockey, tennis and cricket clubs on the Greens Norton Road linking Towcester and Greens Norton and there is also a local junior football club. There are several golf courses in the area and a Leisure Centre in Towcester, with facilities including a swimming pool and fitness centre.

There are multiplex cinemas and theatres which offer excellent productions in Northampton and Milton Keynes. The area benefits from a number of amateur music groups including Towcester Studio Brass Band, Towcester Choral Society and the Greens Norton Community Choir. Additionally, there is an excellent music department at Sponne School. This means our church buildings are often used for concerts and performances.

Accommodation

35 Hazel Crescent, Towcester



The property linked to this Associate Priest post is in Towcester. It is a detached, 1990s modern four-bedroom house on one of the housing estates on the edge of Towcester. It has an enclosed garden and a double garage.



The property is ideally located, with convenient access to both A5 and A43 and within the catchment area for Nicholas Hawksmoor Primary School (Ofsted Good 2021) and Sponne School (Ofsted Outstanding 2012). It is close to the local brook / stream, which has a footpath situated alongside offering easy access to the town centre. Within a short walk from the property is the Leisure Centre, with swimming pool, gym, sports courts and Astro turf facilities.

Downstairs, the property comprises two reception rooms, a study, a kitchen and a cloakroom.



Lounge



Lounge



Dining Room



Kitchen



Downstairs Cloakroom



Stairs to Landing

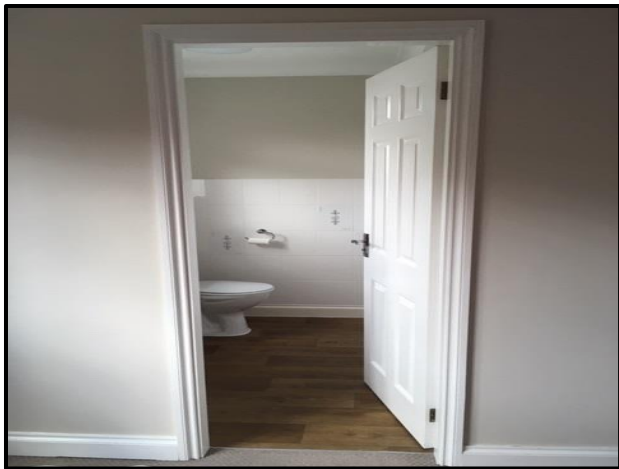
Upstairs there are four bedrooms, one with ensuite; two doubles, two singles and a family bathroom.



Bed 1



Bed 1



Ensuite



Ensuite



Bedroom 2



Bedroom 2



Bedroom 3



Bedroom 3



Bedroom 4



Bedroom 4



Family Bathroom

Ministry



Christingle Service

Statistics and Pattern of Services

Parish numbers as of 2022

Church	Population 2021	Electoral Roll
St Lawrence, Towcester with St Augustine, Caldecote	11,542*	117
St Bartholomew, Greens Norton	1681	58
St Mary, Easton Neston	75	13
St Michael, Bradden	148	17
Totals	13,446	205

* Towcester has had extensive housing development in the last few years. As at May 2022 there are 8,170 over-18s on the political Electoral Roll and 5,500 homes.

Occasional Offices (in 2022)

Church	Baptisms*	Confirmations	Weddings	Funerals
St Lawrence, Towcester with St Augustine, Caldecote	31	2	3	29
St Bartholomew, Greens Norton	6	-	0	8
St Mary, Easton Neston	3	-	2	2
St Michael, Bradden	1	-	0	1
Totals	41	2	5	40
Average over 5 years	22	2	9	34

* Baptisms only took place for half the year in 2021; therefore 2022 saw a significant increase on previous years

Pattern of Services (as at June 2023)

Sunday of Month	Time	Service	Place	Order of Service
Every Sunday	10:15am	Morning Prayer	Zoom	CW
1 st Saturday of every Month	6:00 pm	Holy Communion	Easton Neston	CW Traditional
1 st Sunday	9:15 am	Family Service	Towcester	Informal
	11:15 am	Holy Communion	Greens Norton	CW Modern
2 nd Sunday	9:15 am	Holy Communion	Towcester	CW Modern
	9:15 am	Holy Communion	Bradden	CW Traditional
	11:15 am	Family Praise	Greens Norton	Informal
3 rd Sunday	8.00 am	Holy Communion	Greens Norton	BCP
	9:15 am	Service of the Word	Towcester	CW Modern mainly lay-led
	11:15 am	Holy Communion	Greens Norton	CW Modern
4 th Sunday	9:15 am	Holy Communion	Towcester	CW Modern
	11:15 am	Service of the Word	Greens Norton	CW Modern mainly lay-led
	11:15 am	Eucharist	Caldecote	CW Traditional
5 th Sunday	9:15/11:15am According to Parish	Benefice Eucharist (moving round parishes)	Towcester, Greens Norton, Easton Neston, Bradden	CW Modern

In addition to the above Baptisms are offered on 1st and 3rd Sunday at 2:30pm.

Weekday Services at St Lawrence

Daily	9.00 am	Morning Prayer via Zoom
1 st Tuesday of the month	9.00 am	Eucharist
Wednesday	10.15 am	Eucharist

Each Parish has volunteers who act as Eucharistic Assistants, Sidespersons, Intercessors, and readers. There are small but enthusiastic choirs in both Towcester and Greens Norton. Towcester and Greens Norton have regular organists available to play for services. Easton Neston has an occasional organist and Bradden uses pre-recorded music. Other regular activities include Little Sprouts, Tots Own, seasonal trails, Messy Church, Bible study and a prayer group.

The Benefice holds adult baptism and confirmation classes, an annual explorers course, monthly baptism preparation classes and annual marriage preparation groups. Weekly Bible study takes place online and in person at the Chantry House, led by a Reader.

There is a Benefice-wide Mothers Union which alternates its meetings between Towcester and Greens Norton. Meetings include opportunities for worship, fellowship and guest speakers. This group is a blessed gathering of people of prayer who are encouragers and supporters of our children and families ministry.

Governance

PCCs currently meet four times a year and two of these meetings are Benefice meetings where we begin together for 30mins to discuss Benefice-related items and then break out into individual PCCs to discuss Parish-specific agenda items. Each Parish contributes towards the running costs of the Benefice, clergy expenses and the Benefice Share. The share is consistently met in full with all parishes contributing to it. Each Parish organises separate fund-raising activities and also runs gift-aided planned giving schemes.

The Ministry Team meets once a month, which starts with a Communion service (open to the public). There is also a monthly Preaching and Teaching meeting. The Rector meets bi-monthly (6 times a year) with Churchwardens.

Within the Benefice we currently have a House-for-Duty Curate, a Children and Families Mission Enabler (**CFME**), two Readers, a Lay Pastoral Minister, a Licensed Evangelist, a Reader in Training and an Ordinand in training.

The Benefice has centralised administration based in the Chantry House. The office hours are from 9:30 am to 1:30pm Monday to Friday and the workload is shared between two part-time paid staff, whilst other tasks are carried out by volunteers throughout the Benefice.

The Tove Benefice is part of the Towcester Deanery with Canon Richard Stainer as Rural Dean. As a Benefice we are well represented at Deanery Synod meetings and have a representative on the Diocesan Synod. We have developed excellent working relations with our neighbouring Benefices and a mutually supportive Chapter meets regularly.

Schools

We have four primary schools within the Benefice, three in Towcester and one in Greens Norton. Greens Norton Primary and Towcester Primary are church schools, with which we have strong relationships. Greens Norton is awaiting an OFSTED inspection and in 2022 Towcester Primary underwent a SIAMS inspection and was rated Good with exceptional Collective Worship. Towcester is also home to Nicholas Hawksmoor Primary School and Marie Weller School. These are both part of the Hawksmoor Learning Trust. Marie Weller is a very new school and currently has only two year groups. The local secondary school is Sponne School, the catchment for which includes the parishes in the Benefice and some surrounding benefices.

During the school day, clergy and the CFME lead Collective Worship / Assemblies in our church schools and Nicholas Hawksmoor and we have visited Marie Weller at key seasonal times. Our church schools have services at Harvest, Christmas, Easter and end of school year in church, to which parents are invited. Nicholas Hawksmoor pupils attend church for services at Harvest and this year we are welcoming them for Christmas. Year 7 from Sponne have a Christmas Service and frequently use St Lawrence for music events. We are developing a three-year programme with our schools, which includes Experience Easter (KS2), Experience Harvest (KS1) and Prayer Space (whole school, currently just church schools). Each class in our church schools is invited to attend and take part in Sunday worship once a year as part of our informal family worship.

Community Involvement

The Rector is a governor at both Sponne School and Greens Norton Primary and PCC member of are governors at Towcester Primary. Additionally, a number of church members are governors at both church schools.

Members of the Ministry Team regularly visit our local nursing and residential homes. We lead monthly services in four establishments as well as making prayer visits to some residents' rooms (accompanied by a member of the home's staff). These are a mixture of Communion and Informal Worship services. We are sometimes supported by a keyboard, but often use CDs.



Churches Together Carols in the Square

As part of Churches Together in Towcester, church members are actively engaged in both Towcester Foodbank (which is part of Trussell Trust) and Renew 169 Wellbeing Café. During the year, the CFME and the Youth Minister for the Baptist church lead 'It's your move' transition work with year 6 pupils. We run joint Lent courses, Carols in the Square, World Day of Prayer and Prayers for Christian Unity. We have very good working relationships with the ministers of Churches Together, the Anglican church, Methodists, Catholics and Baptists.



Churches Together World Day of Prayer

Opportunities and Challenges

These are the areas that are key to the further growth of the Benefice which we hope the Associate Priest would foster:

Opportunities

- To grow the spiritual understanding, commitment and fellowship of the Benefice family through home and study groups, and the encouragement of teenagers, and young families;
- To grow a real centre of excellence that has begun with our Children and Families Ministry and further develop our outreach through civic activities, secular networks and social events;
- To assist in the further development of the Benefice as a place of training for both ordained and licensed lay ministries as well as supporting individuals in discerning their calling within the life and worship of the worshipping community;
- To promote and support the development of the church buildings to facilitate and encourage greater use within the expanding community.

We recognise a number of challenges, on which the Ministry Team, including the Associate Priest will focus:

Challenges

- To increase lay involvement to build a cohesive group contributing to both services and social events and to encourage more hands-on organisational involvement;
- To secure long term energy efficiency and sustainability of the church buildings;
- To seek ways in which we can become financially more secure (through stewardship, legacies and grants).

Statement of Need

We are a developing Benefice, with a diversity of worship, continuing to forge closer links between the parishes and moving forward together. Each Parish faces its own distinct challenges but together we feel we need an Associate Priest who:

- operates ably within the variety of worship styles (including BCP, Communion, informal and online);
- enjoys engaging in creative discussions with the wider community;
- has previous experience or insight of working alongside PCCs.
- preferably has digital skills in using zoom and iKnow, but training can be given.

Key Responsibilities

- To be a trusted member of the ministry team, with scope to shape and develop your areas of responsibility around your gifts and skills
- To be involved in all aspects of ministry with the Benefice, taking a share of Occasional Office Services
- To be responsible for the PCCs of Greens Norton and Bradden. This comprises of the on-going engagement with the PCCs, with oversight of four formal meetings a year, for each parish.

Opportunities:

As part of our shared ministry we seek a colleague who would be willing to work collaboratively and be prepared to take leadership of some of these areas:

- Discipleship & Worship
- Children, Families and Youth
- Mission – opportunities with new housing
- Pastoral Care
- Safeguarding
- Heritage & Community Engagement

St Bartholomew's Church, Greens Norton



Community Choir at our Harvest Meal

Village History

The manor was acquired by Sir Henry Green and Thomas, his son, in the fourteenth century from which the name “Greens” Norton is derived. In the early 1700s, the estate devolved to the Duke of Grafton and until the 1920s was part of the extensive Grafton estates.

Village Activities and Community

Greens Norton is one of the liveliest villages in the Towcester locality. In addition to the Church, it has a very well attended Tots Own church pre-school group, two nursery schools, a Church of England Primary School and benefits from many activities and clubs run by villagers. These include The 50+ Club, British Legion, Cricket Club, Community Choir, Scouting and Guiding organisations. There is also a playing field, a substantial “pocket” wildlife park and a community centre.

The village is classed as close to “least deprived” in terms of employment, health and education (ONS indices of deprivation). While there are pockets of relative poverty here, the village is seen as a ‘sought-after’ place to live and housing is always in demand.

The Church of St Bartholomew

St Bartholomew's Church is sited in a prominent position on the Towcester Road and its spire is a notable landmark. It is Saxon in origin, retaining its Saxon nave, while the side aisles are said to date from the mediaeval period. There are several interesting mediaeval artefacts although extensive restoration work was carried out in Victorian times. The fabric of the Church is, in general, in sound order. The Church can seat about 200 people reasonably comfortably.

The organ is fully operational. The tower hosts six bells and we benefit from a long-standing and stalwart team of bell ringers, who also ring at Bradden. A recent recruitment drive has led to several new people learning to ring.

A new Rectory was built in 1986 and is occupied by the Assistant Curate.

Parochial Church Council and Lay Leaders

The PCC meets at least quarterly. Sub-committees are created when needed and there is a Standing Committee to deal with day-to-day issues. Our financial standing is sound and, despite the current

economic situation, giving remains good. We aim to donate 10% of our income to benefit charities both local and global. A Reader, a Lay Pastoral Minister, an Ordinand and a Licensed Evangelist are based in the village.

Church activities

We have a small Wednesday afternoon prayer group and a Mothers' Union as part of the Tove Benefice. As part of our outreach we hold a coffee morning in church every Saturday, with a weekly attendance of 12-15 people from the village. There is a flower arranging group and a churchyard maintenance group. Our Pastoral Minister visits the bereaved and the sick providing Home Communion on request.

We have several special services in the year including Mothers' Day, Harvest Festival, a Memorial Service for the Bereaved, Christingle, Carols by Candlelight and a Christmas Crib service. We support the Benefice Children and Families Mission Enabler who runs special events at the church at Easter and Christmas.



Tots Own Picnic

Areas of co-operation and outreach

We hold various fundraising activities each year including a fête. This is an important village social occasion. In recent years it has been organised jointly with the school, and members of the church play an active role in the Friends of Greens Norton School ("FROGS"). The Remembrance Sunday service, run in collaboration with the local Royal British Legion branch, is very well supported by the community. The church organises a Harvest Supper in conjunction with the village community centre.

Worship

Our worship may be described as 'middle of the road', with varied services catering for the differing needs of the congregation. We believe that Church should be a place of outreach, care and hospitality, giving a warm welcome to all. Like many churches our congregation is ageing, but it is lively and committed.

St Michael's Church, Bradden



Jubilee Celebrations

History

Bradden is a village of 65 houses, ranging from farmhouses, cottages, converted barns and new houses. For 350 years, Bradden House, several of the houses in the village and several hundred acres of agricultural land were in the ownership of the Grant-Ives family. Bradden was essentially a farming village, with the Rector occupying the Old Rectory. The Church is dedicated to St Michael. It is a grade II* listed building. The tower and two lower arches on each side of the tower date from the 14th century. A record of rectors since 1231 is displayed in the Church. In 1858 a part of the roof broke through the ceiling. On examination, the roof was discovered to be in a state of complete decay. The north and south walls were then found to be unfit to carry the new roof and Chancel arch and the arches nearest to it on each side were giving way. Consequently, the Church was rebuilt in 1859, except for the two lower arches on each side of the tower. William White, born in Blakesley, was the architect.

Bradden today

The present owners purchased Bradden House and 180 acres of the Bradden estate, in 2016. Like their predecessors, they enjoy being involved in village life and regularly open their garden to community and fundraising events. Today, the village has a population of about 145, consisting of retired people, some working at or from home and others travelling elsewhere, including to Towcester, Northampton, Milton Keynes and London. There is a village website at www.braddenvillage.org.uk.

St Michael's today

The Church has a robust core of support in the village. The congregation varies between 7 and 20, the average number having remained reasonably steady over the last few years. The PCC believes that, with exemplary leadership and pastoral care, there is potential to attract both higher attendance and, with the support of the Benefice Children and Families Mission Enabler, younger people.



Although many of the population do not attend regularly, we believe most place much value on the presence of the Church. Regular and loyal support is given by bell ringers, led by Nigel Williams, and the tower is used by local ringers for tuition. There is an annual Rogation Day walk, reflecting our connection to the countryside. In 2018, as part of the outreach into the community, the PCC started to run lunches in the village hall, with visiting speakers, on issues such as the Food Bank and the Hope Centre for the homeless. These link into the Church's year during Lent and at Harvest.

As the village lies in the Tove valley, there is a strong sense of unity with the other Churches in the Tove Benefice, particularly Towcester and Greens Norton. Bradden children generally attend the primary school in Greens Norton and Sponne School.

At Christmas, the Church organises carol singing in the village with a local brass band, as well as a crib and carol service, which was attended in 2021 by more than 50 people. Messy Church at Christmas is a ministry to children and families, which was started in Bradden and has now been taken up by the other parishes in the benefice.



Removal of the clock face for repair

Fabric and finances

During 2018, quinquennial works were carried out at a cost of some £20,000. Minor works arising from the 2021 quinquennial survey report are in progress. Over the last two years, the tower clock mechanism was stripped down and cleaned and auto-winders were installed. The clock dial was also refurbished and repainted. The PCC received donations from five charitable bodies to cover the costs of the work on the clock and dial. There are rotas for mowing the churchyard, providing and arranging flowers and for cleaning the Church. There are occasional working parties to tidy and maintain the churchyard.

The PCC works hard to maintain the financial position of the Church and intends to keep this effort up, so far as possible. In particular, the Church benefits from planned giving and is also a beneficiary of the Bradden Town Land Charity, which pays for the annual insurance premium and the upkeep of the fabric.

St Mary the Virgin, Easton Neston



John Breckinbridge Fermor-Hekseth Window

Introduction

St Mary's Church sits in the parkland of the Easton Neston House and dates from the 12th Century. Until 2005, it was used by the Fermor Hesketh family, who were resident at Easton Neston, as their family chapel. Many local people did not know of its existence although it has been an Anglican parish Church since the reformation. The Church has a wealth of tombs, memorials, hatchments and an impressive collection of stained-glass windows showing the family's heraldry. It is notable for its box pews, with that of his Lordship being the largest and lined in velvet. Since the sale and break-up of the Easton Neston estate in 2005, people are gradually becoming aware of this gem on their doorstep and we are having more visitors with more couples choosing to be married here. Recently we have had a window repaired and all windows cleaned, which has made a great difference. We were fortunate to have the costs covered by two generous donors.

The Parish

The parish of St Mary covers the Easton Neston estate, to the village of Hulcote, consisting of 24 unusual but quirky houses, a letter box and a phone box. The hamlet of Showsley, consisting of just 5 houses, and The Shires modern housing estate along Northampton Road. The estate is part of the town of Towcester; the civil and ecclesiastical parishes do not coincide. The School House in Hulcote, which has used to be a community space, has recently been sold off and is being converted into an annex dwelling. Sitting as it does some distance from the population, the Church does not naturally nestle within the congregation and reaching parishioners can be seen as a challenge, although recently when an Open Day was held, we were surprised by how well the event was attended.

Services and Congregation

Our regular congregation averages around 8-10 consisting of more mature pensioners. However, when we hold special services, this number increases. We hold a sung Eucharist at 6pm on the first Saturday of each month. An Easter Egg Hunt is held annually which is well attended by children from the whole Benefice. We recently restarted celebrating our patronal festival and have a slowly increasing ecumenical choir for evensong that weekend. The Church of St Mary, Easton Neston, is the traditional outpost within the Benefice. We have no regular choir but do have a good Henry Willis organ and active bellringers.



Easter Trail

The Church attracts occasional visitors from far afield, probably because of its remote setting, extensive heraldry and superb monuments including the alabaster tomb and life-sized effigies of knight St George Fermor and his wife.

Parochial Church Council and staff

The Parochial Church Council consists of two Churchwardens, Secretary, Treasurer, Lay Reader and three others. The upkeep of the grounds is covered by two members of the congregation.



Wedding at St Mary's

Areas of Outreach

The Church takes part in the national Heritage Open Weekend each September, which coincides with Ride and Stride, and our patronal festival, encouraging people to visit this beautiful Church with refreshments provided.

We also receive a number of visiting bell ringers.

The PCC has recently begun to consider how best to adapt to the needs of the parish, and how we might make more use of the building to serve the Church and wider community. In addition, in future we hope to explore the potential of new events and services, which will attract younger members of the parish.

St Lawrence Church, Towcester with St Augustine Church, Caldecote



Commemoration and Thanksgiving Service for Queen Elizabeth II

Introduction

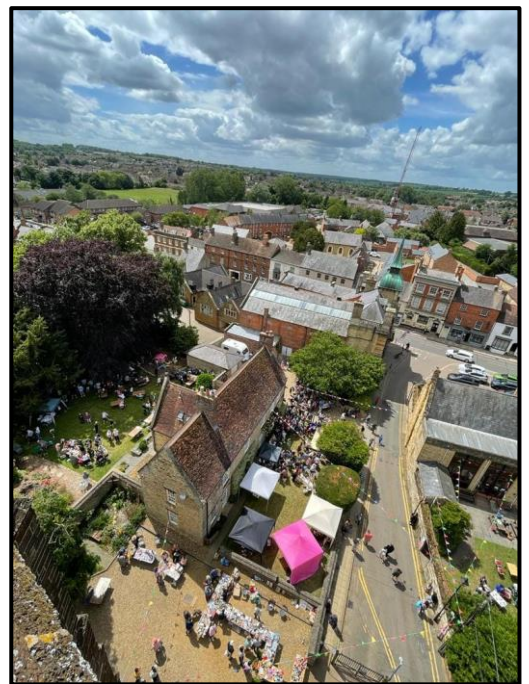
The Church sits in a closed, tranquil churchyard in the heart of Towcester as part of a unique Chantry Close which includes the Chantry House and Vicarage. The tower of St. Lawrence Church is a prominent feature of the Towcester skyline. The buildings are ironstone and date back in part to 1200.

The Chantry House was bequeathed to the “Vicar and Churchwardens” of St Lawrence Church in the 1980s so making available a facility for both the Church and local community. It is well used by local groups and for coffee mornings on Fridays and some Saturdays. The building is managed by a committee who keep it well maintained through its own pattern of fundraising, room letting and by the letting of a three bedroom property in Towcester.

There are a number of active fundraisers and event organisers who can call on others to assist with the calendar of annual events. There is a regular congregation attending mainly Eucharistic services and visitors are also welcomed to baptism, parade and special services. Family services have frequent involvement from the Church primary school and have a good level of attendance with a developing core of families.

The PCC is always keen to keep the building open as much as possible. The number of visitors is surprising, be they historians looking at the actual architecture or those looking for some time to pray or reflect.

St Augustine at Caldecote is a Mission Chapel attached to St Lawrence and serves a small farming community holding one Holy Communion service per month. Christmas and Harvest services are a key part of village life.



St Lawrence fete taken from the Tower

Parochial Church Council and Lay Leaders

The PCC meets quarterly and is supported by Fabric, Chantry, Standing, Social and Fundraising Committees which meet as required.

The PCC works hard to maintain the financial position of the church and benefits from the support of the Richard Hicks Charity, regular giving and a strong fundraising team.

The congregation at St Lawrence has diminished following the pandemic and is slowly rebuilding. The work of the Children and Families Mission Enabler and the work done in the wider community during the pandemic and the Ukraine crisis have resulted in strong feelings of goodwill in the community towards the Church. This has not yet however translated into increased church attendance.



St Lawrence Choir

Church Activities

We are fortunate in having a wide variety of groups that meet in the Church and Chantry House. These include:

Bellringers – the Church Tower houses one of the finest rings of 12 bells in the world and a keen band of ringers. The band is very strong in both numbers and ability and ringers of all abilities are welcome at practices or on a Sunday. It is a principal teaching tower in the area.

Choir – a small mixed voice choir of adults and children meets every Friday and sings at all Sunday services, combining with the Greens Norton church choir for special seasonal events. The choir teaches music reading and follows the RSCM “Voice for Life” programme.

Flower Arrangers – St. Lawrence is fortunate to have a small, dedicated band of flower arrangers, providing seasonal arrangements in Church and for the Flower Festival during the annual fete.

Little Sprouts – this is the St. Lawrence Pre-School Group that meets every Thursday morning in term-time, run by the Children and Families Mission Enabler and volunteers. Many of the Little Sprouts families also attend Church on the first Sunday of each month.



Little Sprouts Praying

Community Involvement

We participate in the Annual Historic Cycle Ride and Heritage Weekends. Together with the Royal British Legion we host the annual Remembrance Sunday Service. This is a significant event in the life of the town and is always very well attended. St. Lawrence is used regularly by the community as it is the largest communal space in the town. It hosts a variety of concerts and other events throughout the year. These include Choral Society, Studio Band, Sponne School, visiting choirs and events such as local and general election hustings.