

The Churn Benefice Profile

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The Churn Benefice Profile

Summary

We are seeking a Rector for the Churn Benefice to replace The Revd Canon Edwin Clements, who has retired.

The Churn Benefice is a group of six ecclesiastical parishes in Oxfordshire to the south and east of Didcot, on the southern edge of the Thames valley. These comprise Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe, Blewbury, Hagbourne, North Moreton, South Moreton and Upton. Hagbourne with a total population of about 2150 is the largest of these, followed by Blewbury with 1530. The other four parishes are of comparable size with populations of about 350 to 400 each. Hagbourne, Upton and Blewbury have been combined into one Benefice for almost 20 years under the previous Rector, Canon Clements. The Astons and the Moretons were likewise combined in 1977 as one Benefice. When their previous Rector resigned in 2005, the two Benefices were combined into a single Benefice under Canon Clements.

At present, there are two clergy in the Benefice: an Ordained Local Minister (OLM), the Revd Louise Butler, who was ordained priest in 2005 and who lives in Blewbury, and a “house-for-duty” Associate Priest, the Revd Anthony Lury, who lives in the former rectory in South Moreton. In addition there is a Lay Pastor, Beryl Hill, who lives in East Hagbourne, and the Benefice Administrator, Mrs Dawn Saunders, who works in the Benefice Centre in Blewbury and is paid by the Benefice.

We also have a Local Ministry Team (LMT) of twelve who were commissioned in 1996. They meet monthly together but also operate in three sub-groups:

- Nurture - who help the Clergy with Confirmation classes and Lent groups etc,
- Pastoral Care - who work with the clergy to co-ordinate pastoral care throughout the Benefice.
- Worship - who take services of the Word when no clergy are available and who are consulted by the Clergy on the format of services.

Four members of the LMT and one other member of the congregation are training to become Authorised Preachers.

At meetings held in July 2007, all six Parochial Church Councils voted formally that they did not want to debate “Resolution B” of the “Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993 (No.2)”. The Benefice is therefore happy to have either a male or a female incumbent.

The Rectory, which was built in 1980, is next to the Church in Blewbury and has four bedrooms and three reception rooms, including a study. Adjoining the Rectory is the Benefice Centre which comprises an office for the Rector and the Administrator upstairs and a meeting room, kitchen and toilet on the ground floor.

We are looking for a Rector who will relish the challenge of combining a rural Benefice ministry with the leadership of the two assistant clergy, the Lay Pastor, the Local Ministry Team and the Benefice Administrator.

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We are hoping for a priest, male or female, who:

- is a gifted leader who will inspire ordained and lay people across the Benefice and be a catalyst for their further development and for their work in their parishes.
- is committed to and has experience of collaborative ministry between clergy and laity.
- has the enthusiasm and abilities necessary to bring people of all ages into the Church and who relates well to the wider community.
- is committed to exercising pastoral care.
- is prayerful, with strong spiritual gifts, energy and integrity.
- is ready to explore and lead us into new ways of sharing the Gospel in rural communities and who understands the particular problems of rural ministry and its scattered communities.
- is comfortable with a range of styles of worship.

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1. The Setting.

1.1 The Churn Benefice.

The Churn Benefice is a group of six ecclesiastical parishes situated to the south and east of Didcot in Oxfordshire, on the southern edge of the Thames valley. There are seven churches in the Benefice, all originally Saxon or medieval with later additions.

The Benefice is in the Deanery of Wallingford, the Archdeaconry of Berkshire, the Episcopal Area of Reading and the Diocese of Oxford.

The parishes are mainly well-defined rural villages with farms between them. Most of the land is flat but the southern parts of Upton, Blewbury and Aston parishes extend up about 100m onto the Downs where the population density is quite low and where there are some race-horse stables.

The ecclesiastical parish of Hagbourne comprises East Hagbourne, West Hagbourne, Coscote and “Millbrook Village”, which is part of the SE suburban development of Didcot. The population is served by St Andrew’s church in East Hagbourne. In the long term, there are plans that Didcot may expand further into and around the Hagbourne civil parishes.

Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe are now essentially one village and are a single ecclesiastical parish with two churches, St Michael’s in Aston Tirrold and the much smaller All Saints’ church in Aston Upthorpe.

North Moreton and South Moreton are separate villages and parishes, split by the main railway line and served by All Saints’ and St John the Baptist churches, respectively.

1.2 Church Property.

The Rectory is in Blewbury, adjacent to the Church, and was built in the early 1980s. It has four bedrooms and three reception rooms, including a study. On the same site is the “Benefice Centre”, a Victorian coach-house and stable building which was modernised by parishioners between 1996 and 2001. This now contains a meeting room for meetings of up to about 20 people, a small kitchen and a toilet on the ground floor, and the Benefice Office, staffed by the Benefice Administrator, together with a photocopier room upstairs, in what used to be the hay-loft. The meeting room also contains an extensive library of religious books. There is a car-park, adjacent to the Benefice Centre, for about 12 cars.

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The Rectory



The Benefice Centre

The Diocesan Board of Finance also another house in the Benefice. In South Moreton the original rectory is now occupied by a “house-for-duty” priest, see Section 1.5, below, page 3.

1.3 Websites.

Details of the Benefice can be found on its website: www.churnchurches.co.uk

Most of the villages also have websites:

Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe:	www.communicate.co.uk/oxford/atau
Blewbury:	www.blewbury.co.uk
East Hagbourne:	www.easthagbourne.net
West Hagbourne:	www.westhagbourne.org
North Moreton:	www.north-moreton.co.uk
South Moreton:	www.south-moreton.co.uk
Upton:	www.uptonvillage.co.uk

1.4 Blewbury Village.

Blewbury is a lively village and for some events people crowd into the Church. In the 2007 Village Festival, the Church was a hub of activity with teas, an Art Exhibition and the Festival Finale held in the Church with contributions from a large number of people.

St Michael’s also hosts concerts by both amateur and professional players. There was a production of *Murder in the Cathedral* in 2005 and several operas commissioned by the village have been performed in the Church. The Blewbury Players put on plays in an open air theatre in the village every summer and occasional other events in the village hall. There is a Youth Club for children in years 6 to 9, which meets weekly in term time. There are many other clubs and societies – a bridge club, ballet club, Womens’ Institute and Village Produce Association to name but four.

On the sporting side, Blewbury has a long established Tennis Club with a strong junior membership, and croquet, cricket, football and badminton clubs.

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1.5 Staff and Local Ministry Team.

In addition to the Rector, there is an Ordained Local Minister (OLM), the Revd Louise Butler who was ordained deacon in 2004 and priest in September 2005. Louise is married with two grown-up children and lives in Blewbury.

There is also a house-for-duty Assistant Priest, the Revd Anthony Lury, who lives in the former South Moreton Rectory with his wife and who joined the Benefice in September 2006. Anthony has three grown-up children.

A member of the Local Ministry Team, Beryl Hill, completed the appropriate training and is now a Lay Pastor, which is a voluntary post. Beryl operates as a member of the staff team, joining the weekly staff meetings to give pastoral input.

The Benefice employs an administrator, Mrs Dawn Saunders, who works in the Benefice Centre office for four days each week in term times and two mornings each week in the school holidays.

In addition to these, there is also a Local Ministry Team (LMT), a group of people from the parishes of Hagbourne, Upton and Blewbury, that works, in conjunction with the Clergy, to support the many aspects of ministry in the Church. In 1996, on the initiative of the then Rector, Canon Edwin Clements, and after a series of open meetings in the Benefice, the Bishop of Reading commissioned the Benefice to form a Local Ministry Team. People were nominated by parishioners and then selected by voting by the Parochial Church Councils. This gave a list of 19 people of whom 13 accepted the invitation to join the team.

There was an initial period of team training in various aspects of ministry. Currently the LMT meet monthly together and at other times operates in 3 sub groups, covering nurture, pastoral care and worship. Nurture supports all aspects of Christian education which annually includes confirmation preparation, Lent and Advent courses. The pastoral group is chaired by our Lay Pastor and monitors and supports pastoral care across the benefice, including the management, training and support of bereavement visitors, visiting the sick and liaising with the hospital chaplaincy where applicable. The worship group meet when there is a need to prepare and lead services of the Word and have been involved, with the Clergy, in deciding the format of various services. An important ethos in the work of the team is to enable all church members to discern and use their gifts in the ministry and mission of the Church.

Various vocations have arisen from this team:

- Louise: to train for the priesthood as OLM. This involved producing a benefice portfolio and supporting Louise over 3 years in many aspects of her training; attending courses with her and giving her feedback in practical and written work.
- Beryl: to train as Pastoral Counsellor and then take up the role of Lay Pastor.
- 4 team members and one other parishioner: to train as Authorised Preachers. These people are currently working on a number of competencies to build up a portfolio and are having practical experience of preaching at different services.

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There has been one new lay member of the team since 1996. Currently the team is composed entirely of members from Blewbury, Hagbourne and Upton. Members are trying to identify people from the parishes of the Astons and Moretons as new recruits to the team.

Several of the laity are licensed to administer the reserved Sacrament to the infirm in their own homes.

1.6 Communications.

There are hourly bus services during the day between Didcot and Hagbourne, Blewbury and Upton, and a bus service which covers a circular route from Didcot to North Moreton, South Moreton, Aston Tirrold, Blewbury, East Hagbourne and back to Didcot six times each day. Neither service runs on Sundays. However, within the Benefice, there is no realistic alternative to using a car. The longest journey is from Upton to North Moreton, which takes about 15 minutes by car.

Outside the Benefice, it takes about 30 minutes to drive to Oxford or Newbury and 40 minutes to Reading. Using the M4, it takes about one and a half hours to Bristol or London Airport and two hours to Central London, depending on the traffic. Using the A34, Portsmouth is one and a half hours away and Birmingham (via A34 and M40) about two hours. Didcot is on the main line from London Paddington to Bristol and South Wales and there is a frequent train service. Trains to Paddington take about 40 minutes and to Bristol about one hour.

1.7 Population and Electoral Rolls.

In the Benefice, there is a mixture of housing, varying from housing association stock (mostly ex-council housing) through modern private estates to isolated farm cottages and listed buildings. The working population mostly travel out of the Benefice for employment, to the towns in the area: Wallingford, Didcot, Oxford and Reading. Some people commute to London.

As noted above, the area is mainly rural, with only part of Hagbourne parish being suburban. The church electoral roll numbers and approximate populations of the six parishes are:

Parish	Electoral Roll	Population (2001 Census)
Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe	40	562
Blewbury	57	1528
Hagbourne	83	2146
North Moreton	38	341
South Moreton	17	350
Upton	34	414

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1.8 Schools.

There are Church of England Controlled Primary Schools in Blewbury and Hagbourne and a Community Primary School in South Moreton. The clergy attend the two church schools regularly, supporting staff, children and parents and taking weekly assemblies. There are school services in the churches every term. The Rector is an ex-officio member of the governing bodies and there is one other foundation governor nominated by the PCCs on each governing body.

There are no secondary schools in the Benefice. Children over the age of eleven travel to schools in Didcot, Wallingford, Compton, Abingdon, Wantage and Oxford.

2. Churches and Church life.

2.1 Recent history.

The two parishes of Blewbury and Upton have been combined under one Rector since 1968. From 1968 until 1989 the Rector was Canon Hugh Pickles. When he died in 1989, these two parishes were combined with Hagbourne as one Benefice under the Revd Edwin Clements, now Canon Clements. This Benefice was known informally as the HUB Benefice (Hagbourne, Upton and Blewbury) and was fortunate to have a curate in training or a house-for-duty priest to assist the Rector for most of the period between 1989 and 2007. The level of cooperation between the three parishes grew as time went on and is high.

The three parishes of Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe, North Moreton and South Moreton have been combined as one Benefice since 1977, with the Revd Christopher Walker as Rector from 1998 to 2005. When he resigned in 2005, the six parishes were combined, in July 2006, into one enlarged Benefice, with Canon Clements as Rector, following the Deanery plan to reduce the number of stipendiary clergy in the Deanery.

2.2 Women priests.

All the six parishes have accepted the ministry of our Ordained Local Minister, the Revd Louise Butler. At their meetings on 16th July 2007, all six PCCs voted formally not to debate Resolution B of the "Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure 1993 (No.2)". This resolution reads: "That this parochial church council would not accept a woman as the incumbent or priest-in-charge of the benefice or as a team vicar for the benefice". Accordingly, all six parishes would be happy to accept a woman as the incumbent.

2.3 Church Services.

The tradition has been that, in Blewbury, Hagbourne and Upton, the Sunday services are held at the same time each week with the exception that the 8.0 am service is held in Blewbury on the first and third Sundays and in Hagbourne on the second and fourth

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Sundays. In the Astons and the Moretons the times of services held in any particular church vary from Sunday to Sunday. As an example, the Schedule of Sunday Services for June 2007 is given in Appendix 2.

Broadly speaking, the churchmanship is “middle-of-the-road” with minor variations between churches. There is a common approach to the main Eucharistic services – the same service booklets are used in all the churches. Vestments are worn in all the churches. Church worship is mainly Eucharistic - Common Worship, Order One in modern language for most services. The sacrament is reserved at Blewbury, Hagbourne, South Moreton and Upton. Incense is used at Blewbury. Evensong takes place at Hagbourne, North Moreton and the Astons, when the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) is used. For the 8.0am Holy Communion in the Astons and the Moretons, BCP language is used with the Common Worship order. Hagbourne and Blewbury have robed choirs which work together from time to time e.g. at weddings and the occasional festival.

Non-Eucharistic Family Services are held monthly in Hagbourne and Blewbury, approximately every 2 months in Upton and monthly, in turn, across the parishes of the Astons, North Moreton and South Moreton, (here each church will have a family service every 3 months). Teams of laity prepare and lead these services.

When there is a fifth Sunday in the month, a Combined Benefice Eucharist is held in one of the Benefice churches in rotation and there are no other 10.30 services.

On the first Wednesday in the month, a Pram Service with Eucharist is held in Blewbury Village Hall for anyone in the Benefice, followed by a “finger-food” lunch provided by the Mothers’ Union.

Mid-morning Eucharists are held in Aston Tirrold on Tuesdays, in Blewbury on Thursdays, in Hagbourne on Wednesdays and Fridays and in Upton on Thursdays.

There are Sunday schools on Sunday mornings in Blewbury and Hagbourne, with the children coming in to join the congregation for the Eucharistic Prayer. On average, there are 5 children in the Blewbury Sunday School and 8 at Hagbourne, though both numbers vary quite widely.

Blewbury and Hagbourne adopted a policy of admitting children to Communion before confirmation and after a year of monthly lessons the first group took their first communions at Advent 2004.

2.4 Benefice Activities.

Confirmation classes are arranged centrally for both children and adults as are Advent and Lent Courses. The most recent Lent course attracted about 30 people over three locations.

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The numbers of baptisms, weddings and funerals held in the Benefice in the last three years are:

	2005 (a)	2006 (b)	2007 (b),(c)
Baptisms	29	22	40
Weddings	13	11	8 (d)
Funerals (including those at the Crematorium)	37	27	21

- (a) Hagbourne, Upton and Blewbury only.
- (b) For the whole of the Churn Benefice.
- (c) To September, but including baptisms and weddings already booked.
- (d) Including two Blessings of Marriage.

Marriage preparation days have been held annually for the last nine years and all couples being married in the Benefice are actively encouraged to attend.

Baptism Preparation is carried out by the laity: one of a team of Baptism Visitors call on the parents before the baptism, showing them a video and answering any questions they may have.

There is a team of Bereavement Visitors who, when needed, visit those who have been bereaved some weeks after the event to provide compassionate care.

There is a Churn Benefice youth group for secondary school age children that meets twice monthly on Sunday evenings at the Benefice Centre. An average attendance is about eight.

There is a Mothers' Union branch in the Benefice which hosts the Benefice Pram Service and supports other work with young families.

2.5 Organisation.

2.5.1 Parochial Church Councils. Each parish has its own PCC which meets every two months. Since the merger of the two Benefices, combined meetings have been started with three PCCs combining, two from one group of parishes and one from the other. Business relevant to the Benefice as a whole is discussed first under the chairmanship of the Rector (e.g. Child Protection Policy). The meeting then splits up into the three separate PCCs, each under their deputy chairman, to discuss matters relevant to that parish alone with the Rector attending when major items are under discussion.

2.5.2 Finance. Each PCC has its own treasurer and is responsible for its own finances and for paying its own Parish Share, which is calculated by the Deanery treasurer on a

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standard formula. One of the parishes has difficulty in meeting its share and has failed to pay all of it for the last two years. For central expenditure (e.g. Clergy Expenses and the Administrator's salary) the parishes pay into a central fund (called the Churn Benefice Fund) according to an agreed formula, largely based on their Parish Shares. There is a separate treasurer for this Fund.

2.5.3 Churchwardens' meetings. The Benefice churchwardens meet every three months, together with the Benefice Clergy and the Churn Fund treasurer, to discuss matters of common interest and to review central expenditure.

2.5.4 Publications. A "pew sheet" - "The Churn" - is published each week by the Benefice Office, giving details of the services for the following week and announcements of various courses and other events. It also lists those who are sick or in trouble and who have asked for prayers, those who have died recently and those whose anniversaries of death fall in the coming week. Included in The Churn is a separate sheet with the texts of the weekly Collect, the Prayer after Communion and the three Bible readings and the psalm for that Sunday. In addition, monthly Church publications in the Benefice include a Parish Magazine in Hagbourne and The Link, an extensive church newsletter, in the Astons and the Moretons. Church news is included in monthly village "magazines", the Blewbury Bulletin, the Upton News and the Astons' News.

2.5.5 Child Protection. All the parishes in the benefice have adopted the Diocesan Child Protection policy, and have appointed a Benefice Child Protection Officer and Advocates in each parish.

2.5.6 Links with Other Churches. Relationships are good with the Methodists in Upton and Blewbury and with the United Reformed Church in Aston Tirrold. Joint services are held at various times through the year.

3. The Churn Benefice: Vision and Goals.

3.1 Vision.

Our vision is to enable, encourage and support the six parishes of the Benefice in their shared objective of growing as Christ's people.

Our strengths and weaknesses may be summarised as follows:

3.2 Strengths.

1. The Benefice works well together although serving very individual communities. This is helped by the existence of the Benefice Centre next to the Rectory with a part-time Administrator and a meeting room.
2. The Local Ministry Team (LMT), a combination of clergy and lay

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parishioners, has been a source of inspiration and has led to an Ordained Local Minister, a Licensed Lay Minister, a Lay Pastor and four Licensed Preachers arising from among its members.

3. Harmony - neither the clergy nor the LMT nor the individual churches are split on theological issues, such as women priests.
4. Five out of the six parishes meet their parish shares and the Benefice as a whole is on a sound financial footing.
5. Church members - and some of the churches - are very involved in their local communities.
6. Children are welcome in all our churches. At Family Services, which are usually taken by the laity, attendance throughout the Benefice is encouraging across the age range. Work with young families grows through baptism preparation visits, the monthly pram service, invitations to Family Services, and a Christian fellowship group with mothers of pre-school children. There are Sunday Schools in Blewbury and Hagbourne and there is a fortnightly youth group.

3.3 Weaknesses.

1. The Church congregations of the smaller parishes are very small.
2. It is difficult to achieve “critical mass” for lively youth work, partly due to transport difficulties in these rural areas.
3. It has proved difficult to recruit and integrate new members to the LMT.
4. Although the two groups of parishes, Blewbury, Hagbourne and Upton on the one hand and the Astons and the Moretons on the other collaborate well, the links between the groups are not yet satisfactory as these collaborative ministries take time to ‘gel’.

3.4 Goals.

Our goals are therefore:

- To be more
 - committed to God.
 - confident in our faith.
 - positive and visible as Christians in our communities.
- To be responsive to the needs of our communities and reach out with the Gospel and demonstrations of God’s love across the generations.

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- To provide appropriate pastoral care.
- To develop and strengthen the links between the two groups of parishes that have only been joined into one Benefice in the last two years i.e. between the Astons and the Moretons on the one hand and Blewbury, Hagbourne and Upton on the other.
- To continue to develop and make increasing use of lay skills and experience.
- To build on the contacts made through marriage preparation, baptisms, weddings and funerals.
- To draw in people of all ages and nurture them - many need support in both their secular and Christian lives.
- To provide the administrative and organisational framework in which the mission of the Benefice can flourish.

4. The Role of the Rector.

- To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- To encourage Christian concern and care for all parts of society.
- To lead in building a lively, caring and growing Christian presence across the Churn Benefice.
- To lead and support the seven church congregations in worship, mission and pastoral care.
- To work collaboratively with the ordained and lay staff in their respective ministries.
- To encourage further lay participation in Ministry, to help individuals discover their own ministry and calling, and to provide ongoing support as part of their Christian growth.
- To foster mutual support, coordination and unity between the different parishes.
- To have responsibility as Incumbent of all the parishes for the PCCs and Annual Parochial Church Meetings.
- To maintain and develop close ties with the three primary schools in the Benefice and act as a Foundation Governor at the Blewbury and Hagbourne Church of England Primary Schools.

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5. The Person.

We are looking for a Rector who will relish the challenge of combining a Benefice ministry with leading and collaborating with the two assistant clergy, the Lay Pastor, the Local Ministry Team and the Benefice Administrator.

We are hoping for a priest, male or female, who:

- is a gifted leader who will inspire ordained and lay people across the Benefice and be a catalyst for their further development and for their work in their parishes.
- is committed to and has experience of collaborative ministry between clergy and laity.
- has the enthusiasm and abilities necessary to bring people of all ages into the Church and who relates well to the wider community.
- is committed to exercising pastoral care.
- is prayerful, with strong spiritual gifts, energy and integrity.
- is ready to explore and lead us into new ways of sharing the Gospel in rural communities and who understands the particular problems of rural ministry and its scattered communities.
- is comfortable with a range of styles of worship.

The Area Dean comments that, since the number of full-time ministers in the Wallingford Deanery is fairly small, the Chapter would value a new member who was committed to regular attendance and to participating in Deanery discussions and initiatives.

The Churn Benefice Profile: Appendices

Appendix 1. Our Churches.

I. Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe.



St Michael's, Aston Tirrold



All Saints', Aston Upthorpe

The twin villages of Aston Tirrold and Aston Upthorpe are Downland villages in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. They are about 5 miles from Didcot and 4 miles from the Thames-side market town of Wallingford. There are many listed buildings and fine views. The two villages are astride a main village road, and both parish boundaries extend across the A417 over the Downs, where there is lovely walking and riding country on the Ridgeway and the Fairmile. Blewburton Hill, on the edge of Aston Upthorpe, is the site of an Iron Age settlement and has wonderful views over the surrounding countryside. There are several village amenities: a pub (with a successful French restaurant), an excellent repair garage and a village hall, which is used not only by village groups, but attracts outside lets as well (such as Pilates, badminton, ballet and indoor bowls). There is one bed and breakfast establishment. The villages also have a well-maintained and attractive recreation ground (at the east end of Aston Tirrold near the A417). It provides cricket, football and boules pitches, and is used by enthusiastic village teams. There is also a hard surface and kick wall and a children's playground. Currently funds are being raised to replace the pavilion, which should be ready for use in 2008.

The Astons have a cricket team, a History Group, a WI branch, a Toddler Group and a number of informal book clubs. There is a monthly Village Newsletter distributed free to every household. There are many village events: an annual Village Fete, a Boules Competition, a Golf Day, a safari supper, quiz nights and a fireworks display, bonfire and barbecue in November. There is a Moretons & Astons Youth Group which meets in the Astons village hall. Since the closure of the Astons primary school, buses have taken the children to and from South Moreton Community Primary School.

St. Michael's, Aston Tirrold is the Parish Church of the Astons, and like All Saints' in Aston Upthorpe (the smaller of the two churches) is a Grade II* listed building with a number of Saxon and mediaeval features. St. Michael's had a Victorian restoration but

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its charm has not been impaired. It has a notable peal of bells, sadly not heard often enough. According to oral tradition, All Saints' is where Ethelred the Unready prayed before fighting the Danes on the Downs. Both Churches are well-maintained structurally.

Congregations at Sunday services generally fluctuate between 10 and 20, with more at festivals and informal services. There is a very popular Carol Service, regarded as a major event in the villages. Attendance by young people generally is low, but there is an encouraging interest in Family and Children's Services. Singing of hymns and canticles is usually quite successful, even without a choir, but psalms are said antiphonally. There is rota of voluntary organists. Some members of the congregation appreciate the use of the Book of Common Prayer from time to time.

Two successful concerts and an exhibition of local arts and crafts have taken place recently, emphasising the church's role as a community resource.

Aston Tirrold United Reformed Church has an active congregation from a wide area around, but few from the Astons attend services. The church building dates from 1628 and there is a recently designed and refurbished Centre for Reflection. A good relationship exists between Anglicans and the URC members, who join together for Remembrance Sunday, Palm Sunday and the house-to-house Christian Aid Collection. The URC provide the Centre for Reflection for an Anglican Pram Service and lunch once a month.

We would welcome a Rector who could reach out to our young people (there are about 110 young people of school age resident in these two villages) and who is also responsive to the needs of our older congregation, who have remained faithful through recent years of difficulties and anxiety over church leadership. We would like an enthusiastic, thoughtful, outgoing person, able to relate to all kinds of people, including non-churchgoers, and prepared to play a part in the activities of the wider community.

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II. Blewbury: St Michael and All Angels.



St Michael's church is in the centre of the village. It is best approached from the north-west, along Church End, as there is a small church car-park (12 cars) adjoining the Rectory drive and the Benefice centre.

The oldest parts of the church date from about 1100 and it was extended in stages until about 1600 when the plan was exactly the same as it is today. The seating is on pews, which can be moved if required, and these will hold about 200 people. The church is heated by overhead radiant electric heaters, supplemented by night-storage heaters.

There is a tower at the west end of the church which holds a ring of eight bells. The oldest of these (number 6) dates from 1586 and further bells were added over the next three centuries until the eight was completed in 1906. The heaviest bell, the tenor, weighs about 18cwt. There is an enthusiastic band of ringers who ring for morning service every Sunday and practice on Friday evenings. There is a pendulum clock in the ringing chamber which dates from the 17th century though much repaired. A clock face on the south wall of the tower was added to celebrate Queen Victoria's jubilee. The clock strikes the hours on the tenor bell and is now electrically wound. It keeps time to within a few seconds per week.

There is a church choir of about 10 adult and 9 junior members who robe and process in for the Parish Eucharist. Practice is on Monday evenings, in the church. There is a Victorian single-manual pipe organ in the main aisle and a two-manual electronic organ which was bought in 2004 in the South Aisle. This is used for most of the services as it is more versatile and, although we have a regular organist, this organ can be played by pianists.

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Incense is used at the Parish Eucharist although this is not welcomed by everyone. The sacrament is reserved. Three members of the congregation are licensed to administer the chalice.

In term-time, there is a Sunday School, attended by 5 to 10 children between the ages of 5 and 10. They meet in the Benefice centre at 10.30 am except when there is a Family Service. Their lessons are largely based on the readings for the day as given in the lectionary. A sidesman collects them so that they join the congregation in church for the Eucharistic Prayer. After appropriate education, some of the children are admitted to communion before confirmation.

Coffee is served after the 10.30 services and once a month there is a "Fair Trade" stall.

The monthly Family Services are planned and led by a small group of the laity. The themes of the services are usually based on the lessons for that Sunday. One member of the group leads the service and another gives the talk. A small group of children play the hymns for this service.

Each year there is a village carol service. An orchestra of local people get together, the Blewbury Brass Band plays carols and the choir and various villagers join together for readings and singing. This is always crowded and a real village event. On Christmas Eve, the Church is packed for a 6.00 Crib Service after which the children crowd onto the Play Close where Father Christmas has arrived on his sledge to distribute presents.

The children of Blewbury C of E school come to church for special services and have also performed Nativity Plays for the congregation.

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III. Hagbourne: St Andrew's.



St Andrew's Church Parish consists of the villages of East Hagbourne and West Hagbourne, Coscote and of Millbrook Village which is part of the nearby town of Didcot. There is an all-age growing congregation at St Andrew's with a significant number of parishioners living in Didcot. The regulars come from a variety of church backgrounds from low-church evangelical to Roman Catholic, with St Andrew's being "middle of the road". However, the important thing is that individuals feel a strong sense of belonging to the church family in this place. St Andrew's is the only church in the Hagbournes. Parts of the building date from the 11th century.

There are strong ties and a good working relationship with the C of E Hagbourne Primary School which is a few minutes' walk from the church. Regular school services are held in church. There are a variety of groups in St Andrew's and these include the PCC, readers and intercessors, organists, a mixed choir, a music group which plays for family services, bell ringers, a Sunday School, servers, sidesmen, welcomers, coffee rota, flower rota, church cleaners, the parish magazine team and the fête committee. Four church members assist with the important ministry of House Communion, administering the reserved Sacrament.

There is a strong tradition of music making at St Andrew's where there is a good pipe organ. Hymns and music for the main services and festivals are chosen by the organist / choir trainer together with a member of the choir. These are selected up to two months in advance, mainly using the RSCM quarterly publication "Sunday by Sunday weekly guide". Hymns for the Family Service are chosen by the Family Service planning group, with advice from the organist. The hymns are a mixture of traditional and modern. This system has been in place for some years as part of collaborative ministry.

St Andrew's is well represented on Benefice-wide organisations such as the Local Ministry Team (LMT) and its sub-groups, which include pastoral care and bereavement

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visitors, nurture and worship groups. Four parishioners are training and licensed to preach at services in the Benefice churches. The Churn Benefice Action Group is involved with the practicalities of charity support.

Outreach is important and includes local initiatives as well as those further afield. St Andrew's is committed to giving 10% of its income to a variety of charities, one of which includes paying the salary of a nurse in Tanzania, a long-term commitment.

As well as services, St Andrew's is used for art exhibitions, concerts (both classical and jazz) and flower festivals. It has also been used for plays and opera.

The church is kept open seven days a week for parishioners and visitors. Recorded music is played over a high quality multi-channel sound system and there is a discreet surveillance system installed to provide security when the church is unattended.

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IV. North Moreton: All Saints’.



In a village of about 100 houses, and around 342 inhabitants (including many young families and relatively few pensioners) our church can accommodate, comfortably, about 100 people and with extra seating, many more. The Church also owns the village hall, and has recently renovated it to modern standards to encourage community use.

All Saints, North Moreton, in the centre of the village, is kept open day and night throughout the year. The building is primarily mediaeval, reflecting English, Decorated and Perpendicular styles. It has a particularly beautiful Chantry Chapel of the 13/14th Century whose east window has tracery and glass of historical importance. The Victorians restored other parts of the building and the whole attracts a considerable number of visitors. It has merited a place in Simon Jenkins book. 'England's Thousand Best Churches'. We are also proud of our five bells which draw ringers from our own and other villages.

The church is supported by many villagers who do not necessarily attend services regularly. Gift Day donations, covenants, other contributions and vigorous fundraising have enabled us to pay our parish share each year. Heating is being installed over the summer months to encourage use of the church over the winter (for families in particular). Fund-raising events for the church or the hall (they include a Fête, safari supper, ride and stride, concerts, displays, garden openings, summer lunch, summer dance) are always well supported by the village and not always run by churchgoers. These events are central to the acknowledged friendly atmosphere, much valued by established residents and newcomers alike.

The cricket club has played a large part in the cohesion of the village, teaching the young from an early age. The toddler group, the excellent school (this in the neighbouring South Moreton) and the management of the village hall, the excellent Parish Council, all call on volunteer labour which is generously given and reflects the mutually supportive spirit in the village which is part of our Christian heritage.

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V. South Moreton: St John the Baptist.



S. John the Baptist is set in the village of South Moreton on the eastern side of the Benefice. The village is of a linear pattern with most of the houses set along the road that runs through the village. The excellent village primary school is at the northern end of the High Street and educates just over 100 pupils from South Moreton and the surrounding villages. The popular Crown pub, which had a new landlord at the beginning of 2007, is at the southern end of the High Street. Nearby is the Strict Baptist Chapel, the congregation of which mainly comes from outside the Parish and has no contact with the church.

South Moreton is 3 miles from both Didcot and the market town of Wallingford. There is a good size recreation ground for which a committee has just been formed to improve the facilities and maintenance. The South and North Moreton Women's Institute, which meets in the North Moreton Village Hall, is well attended and the Moretons' Cricket Club, also based in North Moreton, is always keen to recruit new members, young and old. The Moretons and Aston Youth Club is run by parents from South Moreton for 8 to 16 year olds and is held every Wednesday during term time in Aston Village Hall. A parishioner has recently started up a village web-site (www.south-moreton.co.uk) which includes details of the church.

The church is situated at the end of a 300m long lane to the west of the village and has a grassy area as a car-park which will take about 30 cars. The church was originally built as a chapel for pilgrims crossing the Berkshire Downs on their way to visit the shrine of St Birinus at Dorchester Abbey as it was the only place where it was safe to cross the marsh. The building was restored to its present state in 1849. The church has no stained glass and has a very light and airy feel to it. There is a small pipe organ in the church and the acoustics are very good. There is a Norman Motte and Bailey to the west of the church which may have formed part of the outlying defences of Wallingford Castle, three miles away. There is also an impressive 1600 year old yew tree to the east.

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The congregation for the regular Sunday services numbers between 5 and 15. There tends to be a good attendance at the more traditional Christmas and Easter services, especially the Carol Service where the village children perform a nativity tableau. We have a Family Service once every three months at which we welcome families from all parishes in the Benefice. Despite the tireless efforts of a few staunch supporters, attendances have been falling during the past few years. We are currently trying to change this by involving the many young families in South Moreton and encouraging them to take a more active part in the church. In terms of fund-raising, we have a Safari Supper at least once a year, a gift day, a quiz night and regular coffee mornings. A Fête is occasionally held but the school has a fête every year and it is difficult to sustain two such events in a year in the same small village. The Parish is currently unable to pay its parish share and financial support has been requested from other churches in the Benefice.

Although conforming to a regular pattern across the month, services are different every week with no service on one Sunday. Some research and preparation is therefore needed to find out when and where services are taking place, often necessitating a visit to other nearby churches in the Benefice, although not many people are prepared to do this in practice.

The PCC is currently considering a paper for renewal, entitled “Operation Village Church”, in order to formulate a Parish Action Plan. Whilst they feel that there is some urgency, they will welcome input from the new incumbent as to the way forward.

Our vision for South Moreton Church is that it will once more become a real and effective parish church for the village, fulfilling the Mission of the Church and so increasing its congregation and improving its finances.

This is ambitious but achievable with the help of God.

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VI. Upton: St Mary the Virgin.



St Mary's Church sits on the northern edge of the village which straddles the A417 and has a population of approximately 400 people. The building dates from 1100 and can accommodate a congregation of up to 60 people. Within the past few years, extensive works have been carried out to the fabric including a new wooden floor, a new roof and the installation of a modern heating and lighting system.

The congregation for the regular Sunday Eucharist numbers between 15 and 20. For the family services which are held six times a year to coincide with festivals and other special occasions the congregation can swell up to 80. St Mary's and Upton Methodist Church join together for a number of joint services during the year. From time to time the Church also provides a venue for concerts and other appropriate village activities.

The village has the benefit of a thriving Public House, a well used Village Hall and Recreation Ground together with a part time Post Office. Following the recent preparation of a Village Plan a number of new groups and societies have been formed which has helped to improve the level of community involvement for all ages. The Church organises the Annual Village Fete and other events such as Songs of Praise held outside during the summer.

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Appendix 2. Schedule of Sunday Services: June 2007

3rd June TRINITY SUNDAY

- 8am Holy Eucharist: St. Michael's B
- 8am Holy Eucharist: All Saints' AU
- 9am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Mary's U
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Andrew's H
- 10.30am METHODIST ANNIVERSARY SERVICE:
Blewbury Methodist Chapel
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: All Saints' NM
- 6pm Evensong: St. Andrew's H

10th June THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

- 8am Holy Eucharist: St. John the Baptist SM
- 8am Holy Eucharist: St. Andrew's H
- 9am Morning Prayer: St. Michael's AT
- 9am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Mary's U
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Andrew's H
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Michael's B
- 10.30am Morning Prayer: All Saints' NM
- 6pm Evensong: St. Andrew's H

17th June THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

- 8am Holy Eucharist: St. Michael's B
- 9am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Mary's U
- 9am PARISH EUCHARIST: All Saints' AU
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Andrew's H
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Michael's B
- 10.30am FAMILY SERVICE: St. John the Baptist SM
- 6pm Evensong: St. Andrew's H
- 6pm Evening Prayer: All Saints' NM

24th June THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

- 8am Holy Eucharist: St. Andrew's H
- 8am Holy Eucharist: All Saints' NM
- 9am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Mary's U
- 10.30am FAMILY SERVICE: St. Andrew's H
- 10.30am PARISH EUCHARIST: St. Michael's B
- 10.30am
- 6pm Evensong: St. Andrew's H
- 6pm Evening Prayer: All Saints' AU

AT = Aston Tirrold

H = Hagbourne

SM = South Moreton

AU = Aston Upthorpe

NM = North Moreton

U = Upton

B = Blewbury