

Bishop’s Cleeve (including Southam)  
and Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton

# Benefice Profile

For the appointment of a new Team Rector to our two lovely parishes.

June 2022



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# Introduction

**We're glad you're reading this and perhaps wondering if God is calling you to our benefice.**

"Transforming Lives through Christ's Love" is what we sense we are called to be about, in all sorts of ways, across our team of churches, and in all our communities.

We want to be the most welcoming, loving, and hospitable people on the planet; here for all people regardless of race, gender, sexuality, colour, or background.

We are on a challenging and exciting journey to do that in a whole host of ways across our villages, large and small. We have a breadth of worship preferences within our congregations. It's been challenging to keep these going through the pandemic and within our resources, but it is exciting because of the new ways we have been able to engage with people and make new friends.

We gather for worship, prayer, children's ministry, life groups, and have seen our community and reach grow considerably in recent times.

Our social media presence vastly increased during the pandemic. Going online saw our Facebook group's membership grow from around 250 to 650, with 100s of people watching our Sunday message live or on catchup. We also did some online times of silence and reflection.

We are committed to encouraging and equipping people to live an everyday faith wherever they are between Sundays. Our life together has overflowed in loving mission through Alpha, our "Living Well in Body, Mind and Spirit" courses, our Lent courses, and our excellent Parent and Toddler groups, amongst other things, where across these, we have seen groups rise from nothing, to having upwards of 40 people involved and engaged.

We delight in seeing the Holy Spirit working among us in ways sensitive to our varied traditions.

Our Team Rector post offers a well-supported and exciting opportunity to help our communities thrive and flourish under God's guidance, as together we are led by the Holy Spirit in sharing Christ's love in both established and new ways across our growing villages.

While this profile describes how we do things currently, and what we may hope for as a benefice, we are looking for a Team Rector to come and bring their gifts of leadership to shape what we do next. With our Team Vicar post also being vacant, to be recruited once our new incumbent is in place, there is real opportunity to help us grow and develop in our mission within and beyond our churches.

Our new incumbent will be vital in leading us in sharing God's love with our community of over 19,750 people.

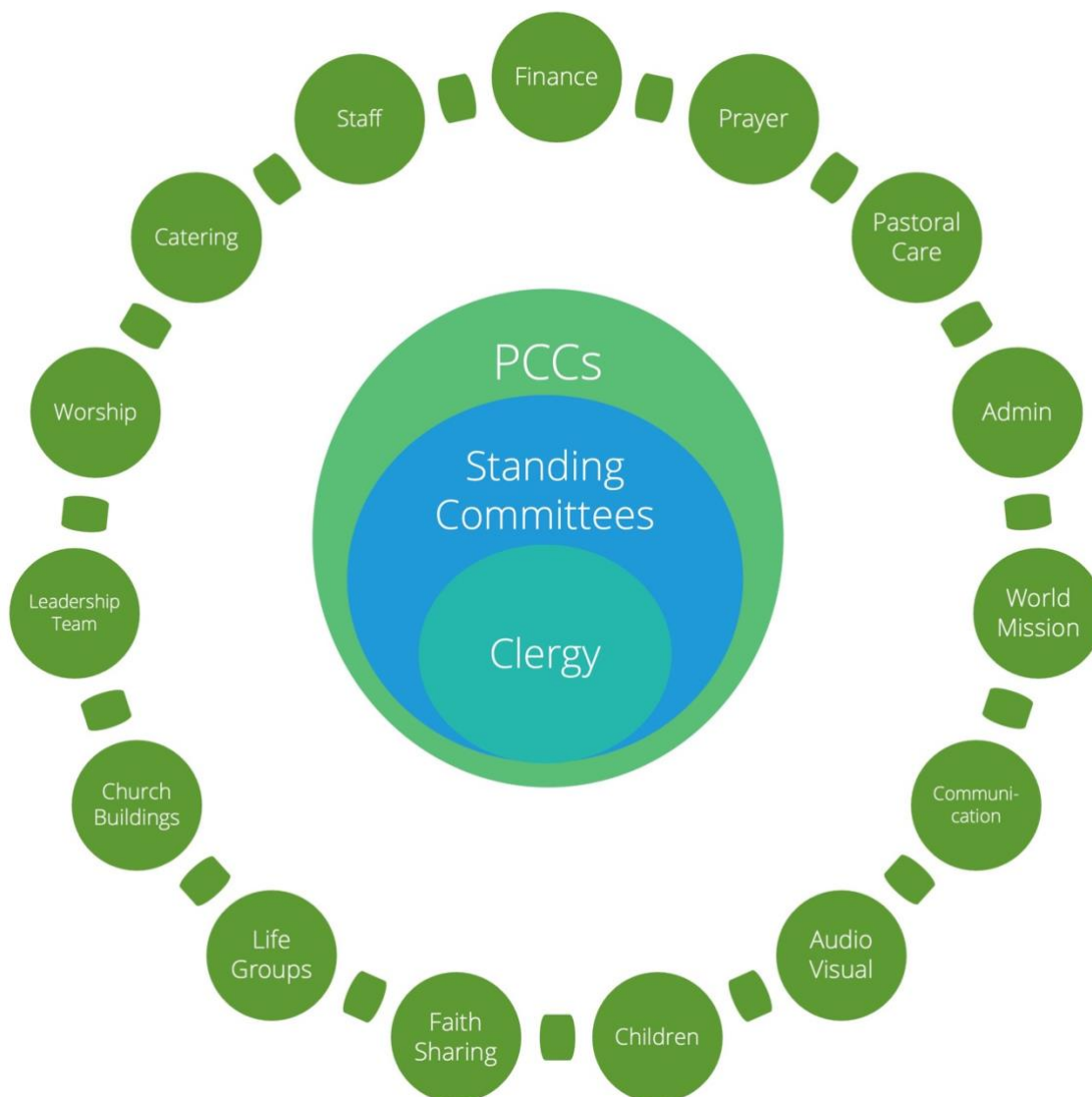
Our historic church buildings stand in beautiful villages. More valuable to us though, and we hope to those we seek to reach, is the life-changing good news of Jesus Christ:

*"How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,  
the good news of peace and salvation,  
the news that the God of Israel reigns!"*

*Isaiah 52:7*

## The Team Rector Post

We are looking to a model where our two ministers work from the centre across the whole team, sharing with others in leading worship, mission, discipleship, pastoral care, and occasional offices, across the whole area, which includes the many new people moving in.



*Areas over which the Team Rector and Team Vicar have joint responsibility across the whole team. Oversight will be shared based on individual gifts and priorities, with responsibilities shared and delegated with lots of other people.*

The Team Rector is our incumbent, overseeing and having accountability for the benefice whilst being supported in and sharing the practical aspects of leadership across the whole team. At St Michael's Church, our Leadership Team, appointed by the Team Rector, has met weekly with him to plan, worship, study and pray.

We are entirely comfortable with the ministry of women as ordained persons, and women have for many years played a full role in the life of our churches.

Bishop's Cleeve will continue to grow substantially as the primary centre of population in the benefice; it will also continue to be the most varied community in terms of age and social status and offers exceptional opportunities for mission and ministry. We see the season ahead will require a costly, sacrificial, 'coming alongside people

where they are' type of ministry. This must be loving, intentional, and adventurous as we look to share the Good News.

**As such we want our new Team Rector to be someone at home with sharing the love of Christ in word and deed, in groups, with individuals, in all sorts of ways and places beyond the church buildings, as together we see God transforming lives through Christ's love.**

Along with this clear need for a strong, outwardly focused ministry across our larger population, we also wish to offer clear and supportive ministry to the smaller villages, building on the specific opportunities and strengths which they bring. Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton PCC particularly hope the new Team Rector will assist this small satellite parish to maintain its identity.

Up to now, our Team Rector has taken the lead with the St Michael's and Southam PCC, and the Team Vicar has taken the lead with Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton PCC and Southam Committee. Ministry on Sundays and weekdays is to be shared across all our clergy and Lay Ministers.

## Key Qualities of our New Team Rector

### **1. Shares their Christian experience generously and inspires discipleship in others.**

Has a strong, living, personal and prayerful Christian faith, and is open to the Holy Spirit in their own life and in the lives of others.

Is Missional in their outlook and walk with Christ.

Inspires others with these qualities and helps to develop them in others.

Is a people-oriented person with an instinct to listen to, and engage with, others.

Encourages the congregation to live their faith wherever they are, each day of the week.

Is attentive to their own continuing personal growth.

### **2. A gifted communicator.**

Keen to share the Gospel and explain its implications through preaching, teaching and discussion, in thoughtful, intelligent and relevant ways, with a clear biblical foundation.

Communicates clearly on other matters to do with church life.

Is able to articulate and bring to life the church's vision in a range of contexts.

### **3. Thrives on leading and being part of a team of ordained and lay ministers.**

Able to share joint responsibility for ministry and mission well across the team.

Is mature, confident, supportive; is prepared at times to disagree, but deals with disagreement responsibly.

Plays a vital part in providing pastoral care to our community.

Is emotionally intelligent and self-aware; knows and can articulate their own working styles, personality and characteristics, and can read and deal with how others relate to them.

Operates at a strategic level as occasion demands whilst being able to be reactive and responsive to situational challenges.

**4. Leads worship well throughout the benefice.**

Is competent across, at ease with, and committed to, the range of styles from traditional to contemporary; including aspects of silence and contemplation, charismatic worship, and personal prayer ministry, and encourages the health and development of all our worship.

Is capable of handling their part in leading occasional offices across the team. (These are also shared by PTO Clergy and the Team Vicar.)

**5. Up for change where necessary.**

Is flexible and adaptable, with the energy and skill to operate collaboratively as part of an active and diverse team.

Is able to draw people together and delegate appropriately.

Identifies the need for change and is able to champion it and prayerfully lead into it.

**6. Handles a variety of external relationships.**

Builds strong, positive relationships.

Relates well with children and adults in our schools.

Relates well and easily to those who do not have Christian faith.

Identifies and supports our responsibilities to Deanery, Diocese, and the world-wide Church and mission.

Engages with the local community and works with ecumenical partners.

**7. Other helpful areas.**

Has demonstrable examples of highly developed leadership skills through seasons of challenge and peace.

Has experience as a line manager.

Is able and happy to drive, as travelling widely around the benefice will be necessary.

Uses IT and modern communications effectively. This includes promoting our life together online to church family and community through social media.

*When applying for our Team Rector position, please provide evidence of all the above points with stories and examples to help us get to know you.*

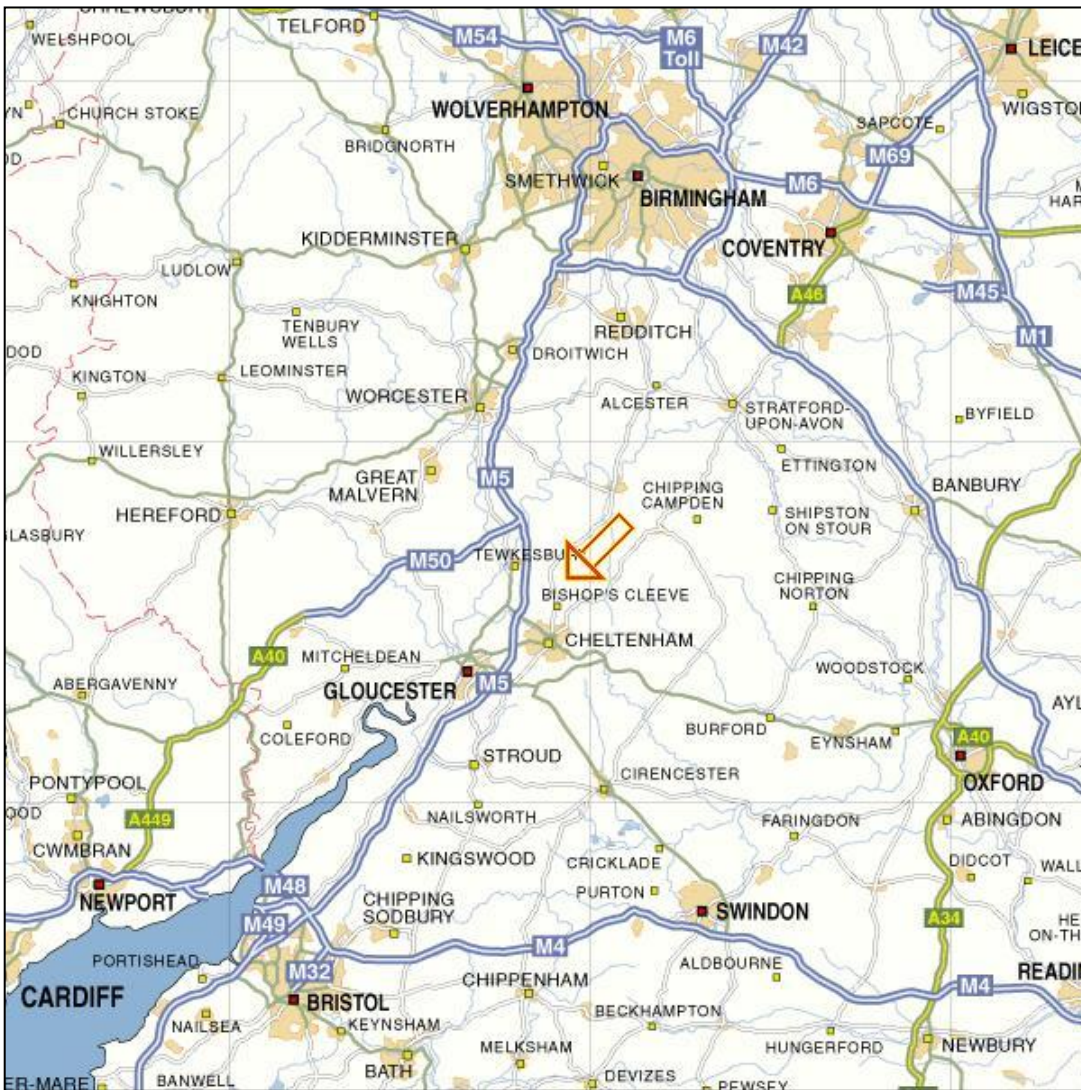
## Location

You will find us between the River Severn and the Cotswold escarpment, just north of Cheltenham.

To the east is the stunning Cleve Hill, the highest point of the Cotswolds, and to the west the land slopes gently down towards the River Severn. The area offers outstanding opportunities for walking, cycling and other outdoor pursuits. Cheltenham, with an excellent selection of cultural opportunities, shops, restaurant and bars, a railway station, the racecourse, and Cheltenham Town FC (League 1), is only five miles away. Gloucester, with its cathedral, docks and rugby club; Tewkesbury, with its beautiful abbey; and many other Cotswold villages and attractions are all easily within reach, and there are excellent transport links to further afield.

In the benefice we have many nurseries, four primary schools (two in Bishop's Cleeve with a further one planned), and one large secondary school. None of these are Church of England schools, however, we have particularly good relationships with all the primary schools, and opportunities lie open to engage with the secondary school.

We have a considerable number of new housing developments on our patch with a diverse mix of socio-economic backgrounds. The overall eclectic assortment of settings, from tiny villages to the spread of new housing, really gives Bishop's Cleeve something of a country town feel. The village is said to be one of the largest in the UK.



# Overview of the Benefice

The benefice is in the Diocese of Gloucester, in the Archdeaconry of Cheltenham, and the Deanery of Tewkesbury and Winchcombe. It was formed in 2008 by joining the existing parishes of Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton, and Bishop's Cleeve, under a Team Ministry for collaboration and mutual support.



*Map of the benefice, showing the two parishes and the various communities.*

## Parish of Bishop's Cleeve including Woodmancote and Southam

Covering the southern two-thirds of the benefice's area, this is the larger parish in terms of population.

**Bishop's Cleeve** is nominally a village but is, in fact, a large suburban community. With **Woodmancote** it effectively forms a small town, both villages having grown rapidly during the middle and late 20<sup>th</sup> century, with more developments in the last few years. The Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway makes a scenic boundary between the two villages.

There is already a wide mix of people within the parish, plus new arrivals including both young families and retirees, which means there is a significant opportunity for community engagement and outreach.

There are some industrial units but no heavy industry; GE Aviation (formerly Smiths Aerospace) is the largest current employer, but many also commute to Cheltenham and further afield. There are good local facilities including sports fields, a library, three supermarkets, various small shops, several takeaways, cafes, six pubs, a

Post Office, and doctors' and dental surgeries. More facilities have been built on the outskirts to service the new estates. There are three good primary schools (Woodmancote, Bishop's Cleeve and Grangefield) and one secondary school (Cleeve School). A new primary school is planned for next year.

Although the parish is named for Bishop's Cleeve, it also includes **Southam**, which has a small daughter church, and its local beauty spot, **Cleeve Hill**.

Southam does not feature in the official name of the parish or the benefice, but it is a significant worship centre in the benefice, so in subsequent discussion here we note Southam as part of Bishop's Cleeve Parish. Though small, the village is active, with the Tithe Barn and the village hall providing good venues, while Ellenborough Park Hotel, with its history of close connection with the church and the aristocracy, graces the scene. Nearby Cleeve Hill, on the Cotswold Way, overlooks us all, and offers fine views down over Woodmancote, Bishop's Cleeve and beyond.

Bishop's Cleeve also has a Methodist Church, and there is a Free Church in Woodmancote. We are linked to these churches through Churches Together.

## Parish of Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton

At the northern end of the benefice, this parish is small in population and is mainly rural. The three villages have been united as a parish since 1934.

**Oxenton** is a small village with a church and a village hall where a variety of social events are normally held. There is easy access to The Gloucestershire Way and many lovely walks. From Oxenton Hill, one has views of the Severn Valley with Tewkesbury Abbey and the Malvern Hills in the distance. There are three working farms within the community.

**Woolstone** is smaller, built on a hill with a church and an arboretum by which runs a public footpath. There are three working farms, one consisting of fruit orchards, and there is easy access to country walks. Woolstone overlooks, in the distance, Gotherington's playing field to which it is joined by a lane and two footpaths.



On the other side of the main road between Gotherington and Woolstone there is a showmen travellers' site, known as Woolstone Place. The children attend Gotherington school.

**Gotherington** has most of this parish's population, but no church building. The village has grown and is still growing, with new developments being built and applications in the pipeline. It has a well-regarded primary school, attended by many who live outside the village. There is also a recently fully refurbished general store with Post Office, a flourishing pub, a garden centre, and a village hall with a pre-school nursery. There is a garage and petrol station on the main road and the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway skirts the edge of the village. Many social and sports clubs for all ages meet regularly, including a Gardening Club, Local History Society, Women's Institute, Wine Circle, and a monthly coffee morning. Football, cricket, tennis and petanque are enjoyed. The Scouting and Guiding movements are well represented with Brownies, Beavers, Cubs and Scouts. The church supports a neighbourhood help scheme, GOWNS.

Another widely used social space is the fully renovated Old Chapel. A weekly Coffee and Chat meeting, Games Club, Film Society, craft activities organised by local companies, pilates, concerts, quiz nights and Father Christmas in his Grotto, are some of the wide and varied activities which take place here. Prior to COVID, members of the Anglican church organised and cooked a two-course hot lunch for older residents of Woolstone, Gotherington and Oxenton on a monthly basis. Last August, a three-day MusicFest was held on Freeman Field.



## Population

The estimated populations of our villages in 2022 sit at approximately **19,750**, broken down from north to south as follows.

- Oxenton: 140
- Woolstone: 110
- Gotherington: 1,100
- Bishop's Cleeve: 14,200
- Woodmancote: 3,000
- Southam: 800
- Cleeve Hill: 400

The large number for Bishop's Cleeve is partly accounted for by 2,000 houses being erected in recent years. Another 630 houses are scheduled to be built in 2022. In Gotherington, 90 new houses were recently built. Such rapid development brings challenges to the community leaders and to the Church leadership.

## Electoral Roll

The ecclesiastical electoral roll figures for the parishes in our benefice are as follows:

- Bishop's Cleeve including Woodmancote and Southam: 238 (37 of these live outside the parish).
- Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton: 52 (five of these live outside the parish).

Total for the benefice: 290

## Congregation Sizes

Approximate average weekly congregation sizes for Sunday worship are as follows:

- Bishop's Cleeve including Woodmancote and Southam: 180 adults plus 18 children in 2019, 88 adults in early 2022.
- Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton: 27 in 2019, 15-20 in early 2022.



*Inside St Michael's, Bishop's Cleeve*

# Mission Statements

Bishop's Cleeve, and Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton, have separate mission statements. These short statements underpin our outreach and faith development work, including regular weekly and monthly events, and occasional services and projects. Both mission statements are reviewed regularly.

## Bishop's Cleeve (St Michael's)

### Transforming Lives Through Christ's Love

Our theme for 2022 is "Living Well in Body, Mind and Spirit".

This we see as us intentionally facing outwards to the communities in which we live, work and play.

This we will do:

1. Through providing a range of opportunities for people to discover greater physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing in relationship with Jesus Christ and His people.
2. By encouraging one another to a more deliberate growing in our faith in Christ, and everyday participation in Christ's life and mission.

What we value in our life together is:

- Being with Jesus.
- Being like Jesus.
- Doing what Jesus did.

In 2022, we are committed to an even greater focus on the following intentional steps:

- To encourage a culture of spiritual/discipleship growth, and provide a clear pathway for people.
- To disciple one another by being together (with another or group) through shared conversations, mentoring and modelling. For example, we can imagine saying to someone "How are you doing in your spiritual life? Could I sit and listen, and let's see about the next step?"
- To provide loving challenge (given by others/accountability in a group/triplets).
- To use challenging questions with one another.
- To equip some people (including Life Group leaders) to be mentors and encouragers of people in their personal growth in Christ.

## Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton

We believe we are called to remain a presence of Christian faith, hope and charity in our three villages, offering opportunities for worship, prayer, Bible study and fellowship and ministering to our parishioners in their joys and their sorrows.

Our priority is to revive our congregations and particularly to welcome those who are moving to Gotherington's new developments.

## Church Staff

### **Vacancy: Team Vicar**

Our previous Team Vicar left us during 2021 to take up a Team Rectorship. Recruitment will begin once our new Team Rector is in place.

### **Adrian Beere, Curate**

I recently joined the team during my third year of curacy. I am enjoying the opportunity of immersing myself within a multi-parish benefice that has a breadth of worship styles, from Cafe Church through to BCP.

Prior to training for ordination at St Mellitus College I spent eight years leading two ministries supporting the homeless and vulnerable.

I am married to Rachel who is a first year curate at the other end of Cheltenham.

### **Sallie Mumford: Children and Families' Minister**

My role as Children and Families' Minister includes running two busy baby and toddler groups each week, running baptism preparation courses for parents and Godparents, Sunday children's groups, safe recruitment of Children and Family Ministry team members, pastoral support, and discipleship with families (and pre-pandemic I was involved in summer holiday clubs).

I'm also a Life Group leader and committed to encouraging Life Group development, especially as new families join the church. I have a heart for vulnerable families and my previous background as Jobcentre Manager was particularly focused around supporting lone parents and the child poverty agenda.

### **Melinda Morris: Children and Families' Team Leader (Part Time)**

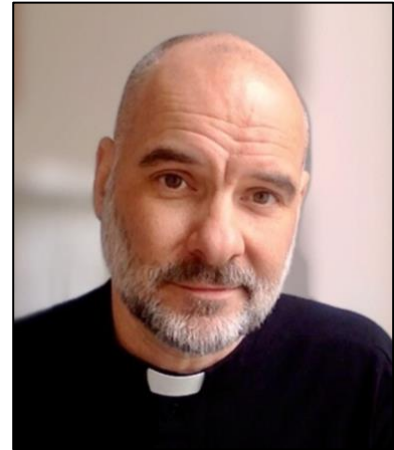
I work with Sallie looking after our church and non-church families. We are bringing Bible stories and worship songs to families outside the church who come to our toddler groups, encouraging them to know the Lord for themselves.

### **Vacancy: Administration Lead and Rector's Assistant**

We are in the process of recruiting for an administration lead who will run the church office, and ensure our Team Rector and Team Vicar are both well supported.

### **Vacancy: Office Administrator**

An administrator is currently being sought to assist with the day-to-day activities of the church office supporting administration across the benefice (both parishes). Recruitment for this position is underway.



## Retired Clergy

Rev John Sharpe, Rev Maggie Sharpe, Rev Wendy Foulger and Rev Bill Blakey (pictured left to right) assist with services across the benefice.

Each has the Bishop's permission to officiate and supports both parishes with their time and spiritual leadership.



## Licensed Lay Ministers

### David Horton

My wife, Janet, and I moved into the area five years ago to be nearer family. It was a wrench leaving the Kent coast where we had lived for fifty years, but the beauty of the Cotswolds has made up for the loss of the sea. I was pleased to find that I could continue with my Reader ministry of over twenty years.

### Kathryn Lea

I have attended St Michael's for 10 years and became a Reader nearly three years ago. I also lead the contemporary worship music group as well as being part of the Church Leadership Team. I am married to Jonathan and we have two grown-up children. I work as a special needs teacher in nearby Tewkesbury.

### Sallie Mumford

I have been a Reader for 13 years and have been attending St Michael's for eight years. I took up the paid role of Children and Families' Minister for the benefice in 2014 after completing my Theology degree. My ministry includes being a member of the Church Leadership Team, taking special family services including 'Thanksgiving for a Child' services, and I am a Godly Play practitioner.



## Pioneer Ministry

### Lucy Barbour: Trainee Pioneer Minister

Pioneering is not so much about one new way of doing church, but is instead an intentional focus on where and who we minister to. It is often a particular call to help the church flourish on the margins, focusing on mission and culture.

I joined St Michael's Church in September 2020 as part of a three-year placement whilst training to be a Pioneer Priest in the Church of England through the Church Mission Society. It has been wonderful to explore new initiatives, especially in the light of the changes COVID has brought. I live in Gotherington and have been working on community building in the village for several years.



**In addition to those mentioned here, our churches are well looked after by dedicated Churchwardens and two PCCs.**

# Pattern of Sunday Worship

## First Sunday

10am Holy Communion, Oxenton

11am Café Church with contemporary worship (intergenerational service), Bishop's Cleeve

## Second Sunday

10am Holy Communion, Woolstone

10am Church on the Hill (relaxed worship and walking outdoors), Cleeve Hill

11am Holy Communion (Order 1 modern with hymns), Bishop's Cleeve

## Third Sunday

10am Morning Praise, Oxenton/Woolstone (alternates)

10am Holy Communion, Southam

11am Contemporary Worship with music group, Bishop's Cleeve

## Fourth Sunday

9.30am Breakfast Church, Southam Village Hall

10am Café Church, Gotherington

11am Holy Communion (Order 1 modern with hymns), Bishop's Cleeve

## Fifth Sunday

10am Book of Common Prayer Holy Communion, Oxenton

10am Morning Prayer, Southam

11am Holy Communion/Contemporary Worship (alternates), Bishop's Cleeve

There is also a Holy Communion service in Bishop's Cleeve on the first and third Thursdays of the month.



*The gathering for our outdoor nativity, Christmas 2021.*

## Children and Families' Ministry

The Children and Families' Ministry (CFM) team are involved with running two busy weekly baby and toddler groups, an Oasis parents' group with creche and focused Christian content, baptism preparation courses through Alpha (four Alpha zoom courses have been run since summer 2020), pastoral follow up with parents post-Alpha, supporting parents into Life Groups and one to one mentoring, working with vulnerable families, issuing Foodbank vouchers, and up until early 2020, identifying families that would benefit from our church 'Take Them a Meal' ministry.

A benefice-wide community holiday club was run every year for five years up until the pandemic hit, with increasing numbers of children attending (72 in 2019), prioritising places for vulnerable families. There is a Godly Playroom in St Michael's, and Godly Play is one of our varied expressions of Children's Sunday morning and toddler group ministry. Our Sunday morning children's groups at St Michael's include Nightlights, supervised creche for 0-3's; Sparklers, Godly Play for 4-8's; and Blaze, our youth group for 9-13's.



### *Praise and Play.*

A JAFFA (Jesus a Friend For Always) lunchtime Bible club running in BCPA primary school, is back up and running with 23 children regularly attending, and a new Lego Bible Club has recently started up in St Michael's after school for primary children. We also have an Urban Saints outreach club for school years 5-8 on a Sunday evening. The CFM team gathered our holiday club and toddler group families this year at special family services run as an alternative to Halloween, and a Christingle Café Church.

Additionally, although not under the remit of CFM team, our lovely 'Open The Book' teams were serving our primary schools in the benefice, until the pandemic called a halt to visitors into schools.

We are acutely aware that we do not have bespoke Youth provision or a Youth Minister in this benefice, although it is our strong desire to have one, subject to necessary funding. Like many other churches, we are challenged by falling numbers of available ministry team members across all teams, as well as pandemic-related restrictions, limiting what we are currently able to do, such as holiday club and schools' work. We are instead listening to God about 'tending the green shoots' rather than 'scattering seeds' in this current season, and we are

therefore planning a Youth Alpha in school summer holidays 2022 for secondary school young people. So far, since writing to our holiday club families, nine young people are planning to come.

## Music

Music is an integral part of worship at St Michael's with the aim of enabling people to draw closer to God. We have several talented musicians in the church who lead sung worship, and we enjoy a variety of worship styles, from traditional to contemporary. Our Holy Communion is led by an organist and choir. At present, we lack a full-time Organist/Director of Music, but a member of the congregation and other local organists play for services. Our contemporary services are led by a group of singers, keyboard and guitars, etc. We have recently installed a new AV system. Our fine set of eight bells welcome the faithful to worship.

At Southam we have a fine organ in very good working order, we have no professional player but do have two very willing amateurs. Our Breakfast Church service, a short service with an opportunity for fellowship which attracts people who don't normally attend church, is accompanied by piano played by a local retired teacher. We have no formal choir but enthusiastic singers in the congregation.

Both of our churches in Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton are blessed with organs although sadly, we have no organist at the moment and use recorded music to accompany our singing. Oxenton Church has hosted a series of concerts in recent years including organ recitals by visiting organists.

Woolstone Church has a delightful set of six bells which are rung by ringers from our two parishes.



*St Michael's Music Group (photographed during times of social distancing).*

## Prayer Ministry

Our benefice is grounded on a foundation of prayer ministry.

Our House of Prayer meets three times a week on Zoom, where we seek God for the coming of his Kingdom in a great way. These are intercessory groups praying for local, national and worldwide issues and activities. There is a sense in which the pandemic drew people more towards prayer; before the pandemic we met twice a month, now we meet 12 times a month.

In addition to these meetings, we have a monthly Day of Prayer where people choose an hour slot every first Sunday of the month. This supplements the weekly Prayer Wall, which is an encouragement to pray for our local churches and community. Our Prayerchain sends out urgent prayer requests from church folk on our list and those receiving it are encouraged to immediately offer those things to God.

We are always trying to extend the borders of our Prayer Ministry. Recently, two church members started a more meditational time on a monthly basis. We are hoping that we can encourage each Life Group to get involved with a particular ministry from the church where this is not already taking place. The ultimate dream is for many more Houses of Prayer and prayer partnerships to start up within the church to continue to build on this prayerful grounding for our benefice.



*Choir at our Carols by Candlelight, December 2019*



## Pastoral Work

The benefice has three licensed Pastoral Assistants who are based at St Michael's, who respond to requests for support such as assistance in completing forms (e.g. for benefits), signposting to appropriate agencies, and who visit/phone those who are sick, lonely and/or bereaved.

Members also link with 'peripheral' care groups such as the monthly Bereavement Coffee/Cake and Chat group. All local funerals are followed up with a letter of condolence and an invitation to the meeting.

The Cleeve Carers and Friendship Group is also supported by a Pastoral Assistant and three church members are on the committee.

Requests for Home Communion come to the Pastoral Assistants who head up a team of those licensed by the Bishop to administer one to one and small group communions.

We do not work exclusively with the elderly, but they form the majority of those for whom we care.

During the pandemic we began a monthly newsletter to facilitate keeping senior members connected with our fellowship. This is an area of our ministry we aim to develop further. 'Faith in Later Life' is an organisation with whom we are associated.

We seek to enlarge our Pastoral Team and further develop our pastoral ministry over the coming months.



*Café Church, 2021.*

# Outreach and Faith Development

## Life Groups

There are currently 12 Life Groups in St Michael's involving 130 people, meeting either during the day or in the evenings. Some are more selective in purpose such as to nurture potential leaders or follow on from Alpha, but all the groups have a valuable role in the life of the church to support individuals through study, prayer and fellowship.

## Mission Partners

We have three mission partners: [North Cotswold Food Bank](#), [Mission Macedonia](#) and [Grass Roots Rwanda](#).

## Alpha

Alpha has been a regular part of our mission in both parishes. We took up the challenge of doing the course on Zoom in 2021 and it worked well, with new friends made, people growing in faith, and some joining a follow-up course we did on mental health.

## Wellness Ministry

We started 2021 with a focus on Living Well in Body, Mind and Spirit, something the team at St Michael's had wanted to do for a while, and that felt quite apt considering all that we were going through with the pandemic. We ran a Life Group series on mental health and faith, an online sermon series, and an online course with people in our community who were not part of our church.

As part of that wellness focus, we ran two mindfulness courses. The first was an introduction to mindfulness which we supported alongside a qualified practitioner from Bishop's Cleeve. The second was a practice group which was more intentionally connected to faith. We have been amazed at how well attended these were and how they connected mostly with people outside the church. We are planning another group specifically for men and have around 10 already interested.

## Church on the Hill

Now part of our regular pattern of Sunday worship, we trialled Church on the Hill in summer 2021 and it was so successful that we have continued to run it every month since. We meet on Cleeve Hill one Sunday a month to walk, talk, and hold a short reflective service before walking back. We are working to grow this aspect of our ministry. Some of the people who come are regular church attenders and some are only coming to this.



## Occasional Offices (2019 and 2021)

		Bishop's Cleeve	Bishop's Cleeve	WGO	WGO
		2021(2)	2019	2021	2019
<b>Baptisms</b>	Age < 1 year	0	11	0	0
	Age 1-4 Years	3	5	0	0
	Age 5-10 years	0	1	0	0
	Age 11-17 years	0	1	0	0
	Adults	0	2	0	0
<b>Thanksgiving</b>		0	3	0	0
<b>Confirmations</b>		0	0	0	0
<b>Weddings</b>		16	14	3	0
<b>Weddings Booked for 2022</b>		13	n/a	3	n/a
<b>Blessings/Renewal of Vows</b>		0	0	0	0
<b>Blessings/Renewal of Vows 2022</b>		4	n/a	0	n/a
<b>Funerals in Church</b>	Taken by PTO Clergy	13	15	1	1
	Total	26	36	2	9
<b>Funerals at Crematorium or Cemetery</b>	Taken by PTO Clergy	22	9	0	0
	Total	28	23	7	3
<b>Burial of Cremated Remains</b>	Taken by PTO Clergy	3	6	0	0
	Total	15	22	5	3

Southam Church has not been used for any occasional services in this period due to its small size and roof repairs.



Church barbecue.

## The Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has, as in many other parts of this nation, impacted us in many ways. As a broad and varied congregation, we represent the plethora of views around lockdowns, vaccination and how the Government should handle the ongoing aspects of learning to live with COVID. Over the past 24 months, we have lost a small number of congregants due to COVID infections and issues caused by other long-term conditions, as well as still having a significant number of extremely clinically vulnerable people across all ages who continue to shield to an extent.

During the first lockdown, we pivoted quickly to our prominent public presence being online, with a significant amount of this falling on the clergy who provided short Sunday services and for a substantial period, daily devotionals and times of reflection which proved popular both with the existing members of the church but also with people new to us. There were separate online offerings across the smaller villages on a Sunday evening and mid-week, although all sessions were open to everyone across the benefice. Many of our Life Groups continued online for the duration of the COVID restrictions, with some now meeting again in person and some still virtually. Where appropriate and safe to do so, we kept running our parent support groups and toddler groups to provide key support to some families identified as being in need, and others who were struggling with lockdown. New communication channels were opened with email updates to over 800 recipients to provide news and information relevant to our villages and our churches.

It was hugely encouraging to see so many of our people provide practical help and support as people we knew were struck down with COVID. A good number of individuals offered pastoral support through telephone or Zoom calls to ensure those who were locked down on their own were not feeling too isolated, and help was provided with the delivery of shopping or medicines to those who were isolating or recovering.

As our buildings have reopened, we have not returned immediately to our old service patterns. Still, we are looking forward to prayerfully understanding what God wants us to do to make His church more accessible and available to everyone in our growing villages. The pandemic has indirectly resulted in our mid-week groups such as Praise and Play 1 and 2 toddler groups and our Oasis parents' group being not just Life Groups in themselves, but churches without walls. We are learning more and more about growing churches beyond the buildings. There is an increasing desire and urgency amongst a number across our parishes to increase our service offerings again to cater for different worship styles. There remain a few who have not yet returned to an in-person service due to remaining concerns around COVID.

We have worked well as PCCs through this period, meeting remotely via Zoom when appropriate and beginning now to meet face to face again. We have consistently managed to agree lovingly on positions such as wearing face masks, social distancing, and how quickly we relax safety measures to suit our congregations' needs and desires.



*Online fellowship.*

## Our Church Buildings

### St Michael and All Angels, Bishop's Cleeve

St Michael and All Angels (known as St Michael's) is a Grade I listed building from the 12th century with subsequent alterations and additions. It has already been reordered and seats about 250 and is in good order. The churchyard is closed.



There are many architectural and historical points of interest, including a unique medieval oak staircase and fine contemporary artwork. There is a toilet and a kitchen with a café area. The most recent building work installed a dais and refurbished the two transepts. There is also a comprehensive AV system, including screens and projectors. Repairs to the clock mechanism were made in 2021, funded by donations from people throughout the village.

The last Quinquennial Inspection was in 2019 and all issues have been addressed.

### The Church of The Ascension, Southam

The Church of The Ascension in Southam is a Grade II listed building from the 12th century which has been part of a monastic community, a farm building, and a cider mill.



In the late 19th century Lord Ellenborough fitted the building out as something of a memorial chapel for his own family, though intending it for use by local people; it retains much of the fascinating character he gave to it, but the church finally reached its current status in 1957 as a daughter church of the Parish of Bishop's Cleeve. The church seats about 50 and is in good order. There is no churchyard.

The last Quinquennial was in 2017 and all work has been completed. Additional work

has been carried out on the church roof to stop the ingress of water staining the East wall; this work was necessary to preserve the historic 'Veronica' painting. This precious painting was extensively restored by an expert last year. We have also had the East wall repainted. If we had the disposable funds we would upgrade the heating system, but sadly that will have to wait.

## St John the Baptist Church, Oxenton

St John the Baptist Church at Oxenton is largely surrounded by fields at the foot of a steep hill overlooking the Severn valley.



Its churchyard – filled with primroses in Spring – is cherished for its quiet beauty by residents of the village, tenders of its graves, walkers, and the congregation. This beauty is complemented by the fine late medieval tower of perfect proportions. The building, appreciated by many as a place of blessed peacefulness, underwent a sensitive restoration in the early 1900s which preserved features dating back to the 12th century. Its harmonious scale, its restrained and historically interesting decoration, and its range of evolving architectural styles have earned it Grade I listed status.

A Quinquennial survey was undertaken very recently and it is probable that much remedial work needs to be done.

## The Church of St Martin de Tours, Woolstone

The Church of St Martin de Tours at Woolstone stands on a steep slope above the village and is also clearly visible across the fields from Gotherington. The church's leaning tower catches the eye but was stabilised 50 years ago; it contains a peal of six small bells and has a loyal team of local ringers as well as being popular with visiting bands.

A late medieval building, much restored in the 1870s, it is now of Grade II listed status. A Quinquennial survey was undertaken in 2021 and an assessment of its implications is underway.



## Other Buildings

### The Old Chapel, Gotherington

Originally called the Church Centre when it was leased by the PCC from the Countess of Huntingdon Trust, this building was purchased by local residents in 2018. Following refurbishment, it is now called the Old Chapel and is made available for a range of village functions. The PCC hire it for Cafe Church and other church activities such as our Lent courses and World Day of Prayer.



### Oxenton Village Hall

This is owned by the church and leased to the Oxenton Village Hall Management Committee comprising residents of the village. The church – often in practice the PCC – has the right to its use a number of times each year. This small building, which was once the village school, is kept in a very good state of repair and has excellent modern facilities. It is adaptable and well used by the community; its value to the church and the community is appreciated.

### St Michael's Centre in Bishop's Cleeve

St Michael's Centre is an independent registered charity serving the community of Bishop's Cleeve. It operates from its own premises, the former St Michael's School, situated in School Road, a building which has played an important part in village life since 1846. In addition to delivering its own activities at the Centre, it offers a variety of options to the public to hire out the premises, either on a regular or one-off basis. St Michael's Centre works in partnership with several local organisations, such as North Cotswold Foodbank, St Michael's Church, and local company, ONTIC. It provides office facilities for the benefice and has close historical and present-day links with the church. Many of our activities which are not suitable for a church building are well catered for in the Centre.



*Alpha held at Woodmancote Primary School.*

## Finances

The finances for the benefice are divided between the two parishes. Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton operates separately from St Michael's. Southam is managed as an independent sub-account to St Michael's, but the accounts are amalgamated for the annual financial returns to the Diocese and Charity Commission.

### Bishop's Cleeve with Woodmancote and Southam

The pre-COVID income typically exceeded £250,000 with matching expenditure. All Parish Share targets were met alongside the payroll for the five employees; these items represent the greatest costs to the PCC, in 2021 this was £94,596. A thriving Children and Families' Ministry has been grown through an annual Gift Day that focuses the stewardship effort of the church. A financial handbook is in place to manage the financial processes, set an annual budget, and ensure long-range costs are suitably planned for. All financial decisions are managed through the Standing Committee or through the PCC.

The national lockdown measures imposed in 2020 had a significant impact on the church funds and a range of measures were imposed to mitigate the worst of the loss of income throughout that year. The Diocesan Parish Giving Scheme remained unaffected providing financial stability against the loss of income to the plate whilst an austerity budget was agreed to tackle the projected deficit of around £40,000. Careful financial management in 2021 looks to have balanced the budget and restored some of the savings providing financial security for the mission and fabric costs expected in 2022.

### Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton

The financial affairs of the Parish of Woolstone with Gotherington and Oxenton have been prudently managed for many years by the PCC and a succession of its treasurers. They have taken it for granted that the requested Parish Share is paid in full each year. In 2021 this was £19,900. Since its introduction, a substantial number of parishioners have contributed to the church through the Parish Giving Scheme. People in the parish have for a long time organised social activities and other fundraising schemes which have significantly supported the work of the church and the maintenance of its buildings. Prudent management of the PCC's investments has provided further funds; this has also enabled a substantial contribution to be made to the funding of the Children and Families' Ministry of the benefice and to The Old Chapel Project in Gotherington. The two organisations, the Friends of Woolstone Church and the Friends of Oxenton Church, have been a channel for support for the maintenance of the two churches from the wider communities in the three villages over many years and often for large projects.



# The Rectory

The Rectory at Bishop's Cleeve is a four-bedroom home with a large garden encircling the property.

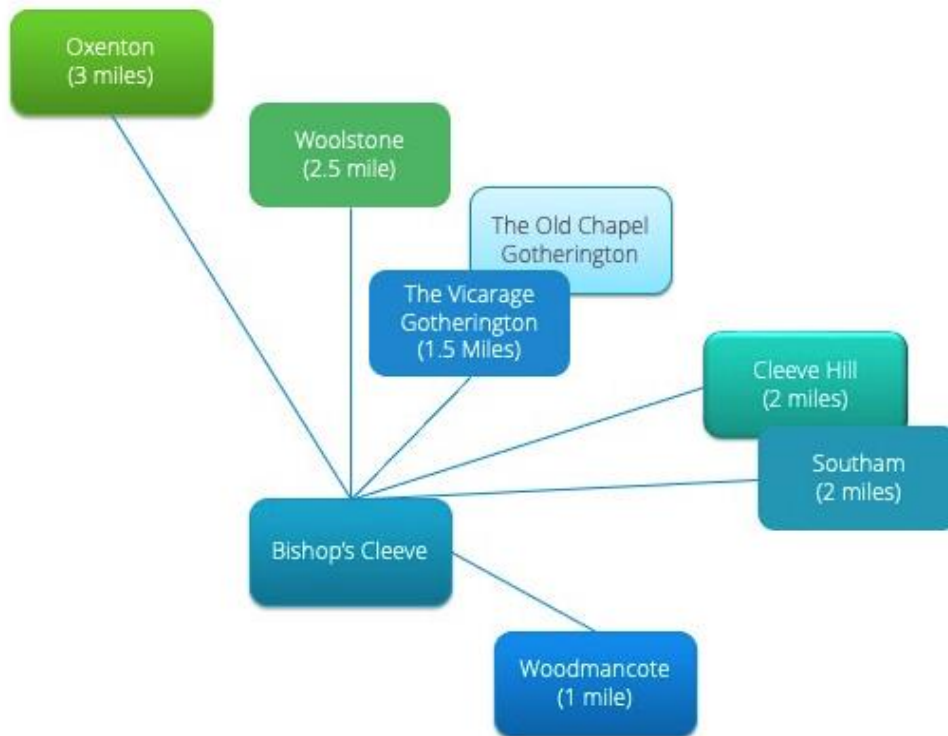
Downstairs there is a spacious hall, a good-sized study, a large lounge and dining room (with sliding door between), a modern kitchen with breakfast bar, a large utility room and toilet.

Upstairs there is a large bathroom with a bath and basin, another smaller toilet, a shower room, and four bedrooms of a very good size. The property also has a large loft and a single garage.

The Rectory is in the heart of the village and very near to St Michael's Church, with shops, cafes and pubs close-by, but is tucked down its own quiet drive with plenty of parking.



Distances from the main operating centres are shown below.



The Team Vicar lives at the Vicarage based at 67 Malleson Road, Gotherington.

## Our Future

We are not a perfect benefice, but we are always working on moving forwards in our missions. For example, we are keen to develop a Youth-focused programme, along with further developing our mission to all other ages represented in our ever-growing local community.

Whilst realising, and respecting, the place for traditional worship, we are excited for innovations, a more cohesive sense of shared mission, prayerful positive change, and new opportunities for discipleship and service.

We are looking for a Team Rector who can lead us and encourage us to strengthen the links between our two parishes, whilst we celebrate our differences as we widen our reach across the whole community.

**Come with your ideas, your experiences, your observations, and your willingness to serve energetically. We look forward to meeting you.**

## Useful Links

- [St Michael's Website](#)
- [St Michael's Facebook Group](#)
- [Gotherington Old Chapel](#)
- [Gotherington Village](#)
- [Gotherington Village Hall](#)