



# Profile of the United Benefice of Marton, Siddington with Capesthorpe, Eaton with Hulme Walfield and Swettenham

Rural Daneside Churches

# Benefice

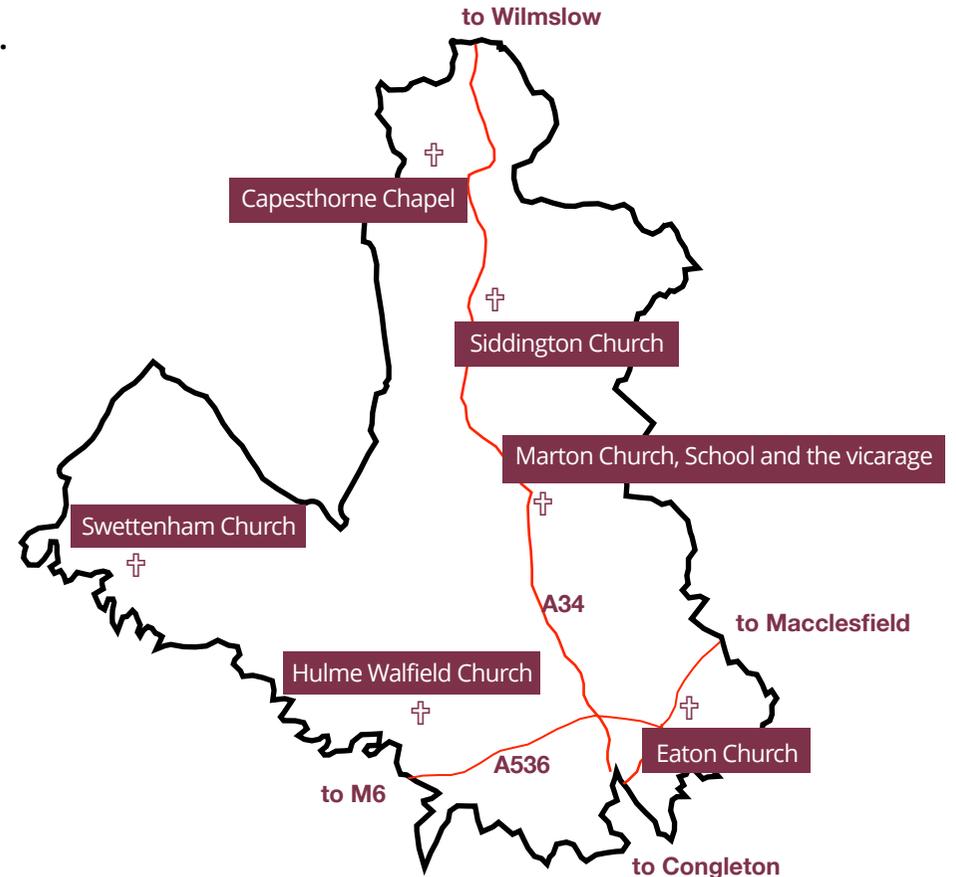
Welcome to the United Benefice of Marton, Siddington with Capesthorpe, Eaton with Hulme Walfield and Swettenham - [the Rural Daneside Churches](#).

The benefice is mainly rural but there are major ongoing housing developments on the south side of Eaton and Hulme Walfield and a small collection of businesses in Marton. The benefice sits between Macclesfield, Alderley Edge and Congleton in Cheshire, and is part of the Congleton Deanery and Macclesfield Archdeaconry within the Chester Diocese.

We believe the way to develop the Christian faith is through parish churches which have their own character and individuality and which reflect the spiritual and pastoral needs of their communities with whom they have close links.

The united benefice is now well established and working well. It offers a wonderful opportunity for the new vicar to lead the community on to the next stage of development.

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# The Benefice Profile

## *The Benefice*

The parishes of the benefice are very different from each other, but in recent years have started to work together well; they are both independent and interdependent and share some common resources. There is an increasing sharing of skills between the parishes. The group of four parishes offers the potential to develop a shared and more efficient approach for tackling common challenges and for offering extra help for individual parishes experiencing more stressful times.

- \* Marton and Siddington have shared ministers many times over the last 500 years and were joined together as a benefice in 1969.
- \* With the arrival of Rev Ian Arch the two were joined by the established pairing of Eaton and Hulme Walfield. (Not strangers to Marton and Siddington because of the united Lent services held by a number of rural parishes in the area for many years, and also because for a time in a previous interregnum we shared a vicar as well)
- \* A Passion Play was performed by these churches soon after this grouping was established to help unite the congregations.
- \* Five years ago Swettenham was added to the group, and the benefice was given a curate to support this. (Because of the nature of the parishes there were social links between Siddington and Swettenham in place.)
- \* Joint benefice services on 5th Sundays were held in the school and now in churches in rotation at the suggestion of the Wardens Plus group.
- \* There is an on-line magazine for the benefice as a whole, complemented by two printed magazines concentrating on separate groupings of parishes.
- \* The benefice started to unite for a successful Wacky Worship monthly service in school, lay led, but with a great deal of support from the curate. Covid stopped this and having lost the curate the vicar decided not to revive it post-pandemic.
- \* **The benefice is pro-active in promoting safeguarding to keep children, young people and adults from harm. We are going through a planned programme of training and DBS checks.**



## *The Benefice continued*

The parish profiles each talk about the joyous coming together of the communities at their social events, whether led by the church or by another local organisation. Each parish has enthusiastic people who relish bringing congregations together with non-

## *Development priorities*

**Areas for development common to all the parishes:**

- \* Each of the churches has increasing its congregation, particularly of younger people, as a priority for the next three years. It is essential that all residents know that the churches are theirs. They will find fellowship, and community, as well as the opportunity to worship together. The turnover of residents in the present villages of the benefice is quite small and when new people move in, they are identified and contacted by a congregation member. However, in the wider Eaton and Hulme Walfield area, there are hundreds of new houses under construction. It is unlikely that many residents can identify the two churches as theirs. Ideas from our new vicar on how we communicate with them will be very welcome;
- \* We can see that holding special services has a positive effect on numbers, with each church having its favourites e.g. Siddington's Animal Service, Marton's Outdoor Nativity and Hulme Walfield's Crib Service. Involvement with the local school, young people's groups such as Young Farmers and musical groups such as the already popular Siddington Community Choir make a difference;
- \* Pastoral care. Happy communities are healthy communities. At the moment, pastoral care of isolated or unwell members of the

worshippers to celebrate life and fellowship, and sometimes to raise funds to support the churches. Marton, Siddington and Eaton with Hulme Walfield all hold summer fetes, which are the major social activities of the villages.

community is on an informal 'grapevine' level, which can be effective, but has drawbacks. The current external challenges to physical and mental wellbeing threaten health and mean that the parishes need to broaden and deepen their programme of pastoral care, especially for our more vulnerable people. Ideally, this will be a benefice-wide initiative that quickly gathers momentum from a wider spectrum of ideas, community spirit and support resources;

- \* We want our churches to be the places people automatically think of when they need to celebrate life events. All residents of each parish should know that the church is their parish church, that they can come to it for their weddings and funerals. This may then lead to an increase in the numbers of people coming to more regular and celebratory services; and
- \* Increase the numbers of people willing and able to lead services and become qualified to bear the chalice at communion services. This has started to happen, and has taken some of the load from the vicar.

**All these priorities will require leadership and dedicated parish teams.**

# The Benefice Profile

## *Wardens Plus*

**Founded after the Covid pandemic. During Covid, people from across the benefice came together over Zoom to produce dramatised readings for YouTube services. It was noted by the organiser that many general church discussions were happening on these calls.**

- \* When the churches reopened post-Covid it was decided to continue these sessions, as a way for the wardens and other officers to chat over matters of mutual interest or concern.
- \* It was decided by the vicar that the chair and vice-chair should be experienced officers, but not wardens, so that they can remain neutral when necessary. Being experienced officers also allows them to offer guidance and support to newer members if needed and allows for continuity even while individual wardens may change.
- \* Increasingly the group has begun to recognise the skills which the individual parishes can offer and have started to share these.
- \* The vicar attends only when there has been a specific matter requiring clerical input.
- \* It was a pleasure to have Bishop Sam attend one of the meetings to discuss a matter of concern, and to meet the bishop when the vicar resigned.
- \* The Wardens Plus group met the then archdeacon and assistant rural dean to discuss the way forward.
- \* The vicar tasked the Wardens Plus with working together to guide the benefice through the vacancy.
- \* At all times the members of the group are working interdependently for their independent churches.
- \* Matters for discussion have been as varied in importance and topic as acquiring Churchwarden Yearbooks for wardens who were unaware of these, the huge difficulties the benefice faced when a curate was not available, and advice/support for a warden over a challenge to his authority in a PCC meeting.



# The Benefice Profile

## The School

**The school is Marton and District C E Aided Primary School which was formed in 1969 as a “school of the future” after the closure of 7 village schools (including those of the benefice). It is situated near the vicarage and Marton church.**



- \* There is a strong family feel at the school, with many family links between the generations who have attended, including a member of staff who was a pupil herself.
- \* The school catchment area is 100 square miles! Some pupils live in the wider Congleton area. As the nearby new housing is occupied, incoming children may join the roll, giving the opportunity to encourage their parents to bring them to worship at one of our churches.
- \* The governing body has 12 members, the majority of whom are Foundation Governors.
- \* The previous vicar has led worship each week, in school, and sometimes in Marton Church when parents may be invited. Others are also invited into school to lead worship.
- \* There is a prayer garden in the school grounds.
- \* The school has a pupil Ethos Group
- \* Special consideration is given to the emotional well-being of all pupils.
- \* The vicar is a trustee of the land and is a member of the governing body. (Originally, and for many years, was chair of this.)
- \* Number on roll summer 2023 = 175, including 3 Ukrainian children
- \* There are thriving breakfast and after school clubs. (The MAD House!)
- \* Single classes per year group
- \* Ofsted rating 2023 = Good
- \* A Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS) inspection is expected soon.
- \* [www.marton.cheshire.sch.uk](http://www.marton.cheshire.sch.uk)



# The Benefice Profile

## *The Vicarage*

**Modern vicarage built in the 1980s in beautiful surroundings within Marton village with spectacular views across the Cheshire countryside as far as Bosley Cloud.**

- \* 4 bedrooms, (master with en-suite, French doors and Juliet balcony). Family bathroom with bath. Large lounge; dining room leading to a well designed, recently remodelled kitchen; study; downstairs cloakroom. Double garage. Good sized but manageable gardens.
- \* Oil heating
- \* Close to the school, and the bus for the secondary school stops near the end of the lane.
- \* Easy access to Congleton, Macclesfield and other nearby towns.



# Our New Vicar

**We feel we can offer our new vicar a challenging but ultimately fulfilling role, in a beautifully situated area. They will be working with a group of parishes who wish to remain independent but are learning to work together for mutual support.**

**We want our new vicar to be comfortable living in our parishes, growing in understanding of our individual needs and developing our spiritual life as a family in faith.**

## Role

We are seeking a vicar who will:

- \* Provide oversight and team leadership in our spiritual life;
- \* Pursue growth, both in numbers and in spiritual depth, working in partnership with the ministry team, churchwardens, PCCs and congregations;
- \* Develop our capacity to provide pastoral support; and
- \* Enhance the ongoing work with our school.

## Profile

We would like our new vicar to:

- \* Be able to acknowledge the proud traditions of each individual parish, to foster and encourage the interdependency of those parishes to

ensure that the benefice grows in mutual support, co-operation and love;

- \* Either have experience of, or a willingness to learn about and put into practice, the rural way of life and worship;
- \* Guide us to recognise that we have areas in which we need to change;
- \* Engage in open and honest discussion about how our benefice works well together, but also to identify and work to resolve any differences of opinion and perhaps ethos, so that the benefice grows in strength to become a leading example of parishes working together;
- \* Celebrate those things that we all do well, and to be a critical friend and to work with us when we struggle;
- \* Be a friend to all and show favouritism to none. We want our benefice to be a thriving, welcoming, supportive and above all loving place for any and all, regardless of gender, sexuality, age or infirmity; and
- \* Crucially, have a sense of humour and a sense of fun!

**We would like our new vicar to encourage our benefice to be a beacon of love and understanding to those who encounter us.**

**We recognise that we cannot be perfect all the time but we strive to be the best that we can, as such we want our vicar to support us in our mission to create sustainable, happy and thriving congregations in all our churches.**

# The Parish Profiles

## *The Church of St James and St Paul, Marton*

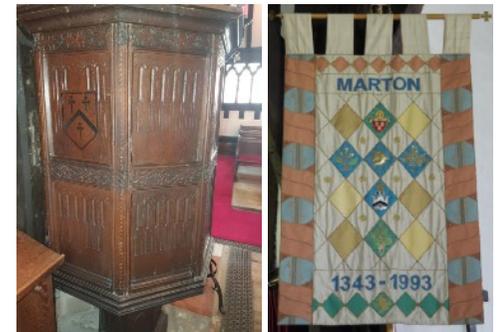
### 1. History and background of the parish

**'One of the finest examples of the medieval wooden church remaining in England today'. Architectural historian Nickolaus Pevsner called Marton Church 'one of the architectural gems of Cheshire'.**

- \* Marton Church was founded in 1343 by Sir John De Davenport, who lived in Marton Hall, which is now, after substantial remodeling, a farmhouse that can be seen from the church grounds. We believe this is why the church was built on a mound, to ensure that it could be seen from the hall. The descendants of Sir John are the Bromley Davenport family of Capesthorpe Hall. The majority of the land and countryside of the parish form part of the Capesthorpe Estate.
- \* The parish of Marton is a small, rural village with a population of around 200, with a diverse range of backgrounds, from well-established ancient families, to families who have recently joined the community, covering an age-range from pre-school to retired persons. A wide assortment of businesses operate within the parish and a wide range of professional people reside here as well. This is reflected in the congregation of St James and St Paul's Church. Marton is a thriving community which has

traditionally looked to the church and its congregation to lead its annual events, as well as be a focal point for worship.

- \* Next to the church is the Church Farm complex of shops and businesses, now the main centre of commerce in the community. Across the road is the 18th Century Davenport Arms pub. There are still working farms which make up the majority of the land in Marton, though there are not as many as there used to be. Links to the Davenport family can be seen in many places in the village, one being the crest shown on the pulpit in church.
- \* Marton is proud of its place in the Cheshire countryside. The Marton Oak, was deemed one of [50 Great British Trees](#) selected in 2002. Oak Cottage and Pump Cottage, are both thatched and oak -framed, as are other buildings in the village.



## History and background of the parish continued

- \* The church itself is a building of national significance, being the oldest, half-timbered, longitudinally-aisled place of worship still in use in Europe. As such it attracts visitors from far and wide and has been the subject of investigations and broadcasts, for example this Youtube episode presented by James Balme.
- \* [A Medieval Treasure of Marton](#)
- \* The Church contains some intricately designed stained glass, including some pagan type symbols of fertility! Unsurprisingly the windows also contain many depictions of oak leaves. There is a medieval doom painting on the west wall, and paintings of Moses and Aaron, painted by one of the founders of the Royal Academy of Art.
- \* Inside the belfry or narthex of the Church are two stone effigies, that were once outside in the graveyard and depict Sir John and his son Vivian.

## 2. St James and St Paul today

**Attendance at our church has dwindled over the past 25 years, as is reflected in the Church of England as a whole. A contributing factor is the steep flight of steps, the only access, that makes it difficult for some people to attend. We have a small, regular worshipping congregation, which is very slowly beginning to build up again.**

- \* The church is a popular choice for weddings, being a very picturesque venue. We are currently in a post Covid lull for weddings but we do expect to see more in the next year or so.
- \* The church is a local landmark and is easily recognised by those who travel past on the adjacent A34 every day.
- \* The annual Marton Wakes Fete, in July, according to records, has been in existence since at least 1611, making it one of the oldest if not THE oldest known to exist. Here, we witness the crowning of our Rose Queen and Oak King. On the following Sunday evening, we hold our Fete Service at which we formally welcome our new King and Queen.



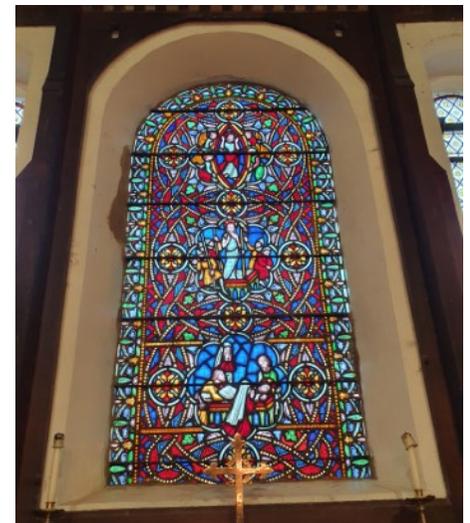
## 2. St James and St Paul today continued

- \* Our church has had some financial instability and does have a debt to the diocese for missed parish share payments. However, we do have a plan in place and are making payments to clear this debt, due in large part to our previous treasurer (now sadly deceased). He worked hard to gain support from as many people as possible within the parish, encouraging them to donate to the upkeep of the church, using the line that you may not come to church, but do you want to lose it? This had a great effect and allowed us to be placed back on a stable financial footing.
- \* Restoration of the East Window was completed in 2021, bringing it back to its former glory. We have recently completed a refurbishment of our organ as well.
- \* The church is used for some meetings, especially meetings of the PCC and the Marton Wakes Committee. It is also used as a starting point for walkers and a way point for cyclists. It is clear

therefore that it is not just a place of worship, but a resource that can be used by all.

- \* We have our challenges and are trying our best to remain relevant in a modern world. We do not have significant numbers of younger people in the parish who attend regularly and therefore do not have regular services for children. Our congregation, at the moment, could best be described as older, though not necessarily old. We do regularly invite younger members of the parish to attend and do readings and prayers at special services and be involved in the annual fete, so to say that we do not have any younger members at all would be false.
- \* The previously mentioned Church Farm complex which houses businesses and eateries, is at the heart of the parish. But there are also other significant places of business and interest of considerable variety in the parish. Of course, agriculture is still a big part of the village and rural traditions, both in and out of church are still a large part of life.

**Marton just like any other place has its own personality, sometimes quirky, sometimes serious, sometimes downright bizarre, but we hope it is a welcoming and happy place to live. We look forward to meeting our new vicar, whoever they may be.**



### 3. Where does the parish want to be in 2026?

**As a parish in 'rebuilding' mode, we aren't only looking three years into the future, but also ten and twenty years into the future. The renovation of the building and the resultant changes are a long-term project for us.**

- \* We want our church to once again be bustling with activity, used as a place of worship but also as a resource, where meetings can be held, groups can meet and activities be undertaken.
- \* We want our church and congregation to be the centre of the community, preserving our traditions but also embracing new ones, catering for those who are used to the 'old' ways but also those who want to do new things and who want to 'innovate'.
- \* Our unique and special surroundings are our selling point, and we want to celebrate them.
- \* We look forward to being able to make our church fit for the future, through widening participation and improving its facilities.
- \* We also look forward to a time when our church will once again be the place of choice where the seasonal markers are joyfully celebrated once again.

### 4. How is the parish going to get there?

**We are currently in the beginning stages of plans and fundraising to renovate our church, a big part of which will be the installation of a new footpath. Designs for it have been approved and are in the process of being integrated into the plans. There are also plans for a toilet and kitchen facility. Interested bodies (the National Churches Trust, The Victorian Society, Historic England etc) are involved with consultations, and grant applications are beginning to be prepared.**

- \* In order to rebuild our congregation we have begun to develop new and special services. We have a set of particular services related to a rural/farming setting, with food served at each: Plough with Breakfast; Lammas with Lunch; and Harvest with

Supper. We have begun a service of Beating the Bounds where we walk around the parish to specific points of interest, offer prayers and use sticks to 'beat' whatever station we are at at the time.



## How is the parish going to get there? continued

- \* Our service of All Souls in November and Renewal of Baptismal vows at Candlemass, are the two bookends of life. We ask individuals to take part in a service as a reader or intercessor or in other ways. Through this we are slowly increasing our congregation as familiarity with the services improves.
- \* Recently a small team of volunteers has emerged who regularly spend time inspecting the church and its surroundings, noting things that need attention and making plans for maintenance days. This has led to local businesses becoming involved and lending their individual expertise to help with these tasks. As a result many small jobs have been completed, so the building is being improved and looked after better. Regular jobs include trimming trees and growth in the churchyard, maintenance of wooden benches, fire extinguisher and electrical checks and other similar works. This team has had a direct impact already. The south door which, for 50 years had been unusable as a main entrance, is now fully functional once again.
- \* Our outdoor nativity has taken the place of the carol service. This is held in the grounds of the church and in

**The best description of our church community would be to say that it is “rebuilding”. We look forward to the help and input of our new vicar to further our goals and rebuild our worshipping community. We hope that our vicar will be sensitive to our rural traditions and sensibilities and be willing to wholeheartedly support as many of our events as they can, joining us to celebrate our way of life and not mind too much the idiosyncrasies of rural life!**

the large barn behind the church. It is open to anyone who wishes to attend and has a bit of a ‘Dibley’ feel to it, often slightly chaotic. This adds to its charm and means that it is a very enjoyable event, attracting local people who wouldn’t necessarily go to the carol service. Hence we reach a much wider congregation than those who habitually attend the ‘normal’ services. It is well and ably supported by our friends at the golf course who provide mince pies and mulled wine for us!

- \* We are lucky that there are individuals within the parish willing to take on leadership roles within the PCC and fundraising committees, and who organise other events that the church does not lead directly. These people have become a valuable resource that allows us to think about the future with a certain amount of confidence. Links with the golf course, the school and local businesses fostered by these individuals have allowed many collaborations in support of social activities and we hope that these will become ever stronger as the years go by.



# All Saints Church, Siddington with Holy Trinity Chapel, Capesthorpe

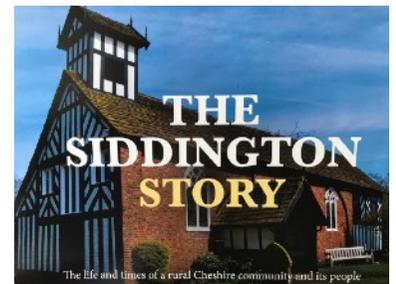
## 1. History and background of the parish

All Saints is at the centre of a rural parish, mostly farmland, and farming families have a long history of involvement with the church. A small former local authority housing estate has long since passed out of council ownership, and the houses have been mostly extended and modernised by subsequent owners. Attractive properties abound in the village, many developed from estate cottages.

- \* Siddington has for centuries been part of the Capesthorpe Estate, home of the Bromley-Davenport family, whose head is Patron and with whom the church has a good working relationship. The Patron and immediate family are frequent, popular and very approachable worshippers at All Saints.
- \* The church's Grade II\* listing has not always made changes to the building easy, but the removal of pews to create a 'brew station' was completed some years ago.
- \* All Saints was built on a timber frame with wattle and daub plaster. Nothing is known for sure about its earliest history, except that it existed in 1371 when it was mentioned in a will, but it was not consecrated until 1521. The church's quirky (even eccentric) but striking appearance has its roots in the 1700s when local stone slabs replaced the original, probably thatched, roof. Sadly, the timber frame later showed signs of buckling, and in 1816 a radical solution saw most of the church

encased in a brick 'sandwich' to support the heavy roof. Later, the plain plasterwork inside and some of the brick exterior was painted to imitate the original timberwork pattern. Parts of the original frame in the nave is still visible from vantage points inside and out.

- \* The churchyard is now using an extension for burials (given by the Estate), something of a rarity these days, which possibly reflects the church's position in the community.
- \* 'The Siddington Story - the life and times of a rural Cheshire community and its people' was published this year by the PCC, and compiled by a PCC member, to mark the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church's consecration. It chronicles the history of the church and development of the village. Copies are available by arrangement.



## 2. All Saints today

**'Team Siddington' is a great strength. It is a forward-looking group of people ready and able to use their knowledge and personal skills to support our ministry team in tackling whatever comes the church's way. It has developed from the church's principle of having wardens serving two years, thus bringing more people into a greater understanding of how the church works. Not all are former wardens, however. Team membership varies according to need.**

- \* Our finances are healthy and we have an effective PCC (with vice-chair, secretary and treasurer) representative of all aspects of the congregation and wider community.
- \* We have a pool of people willing to lead non-communion worship when needed, and a growing number of people qualified to bear the chalice at communion.
- \* All Saints is a broad church (with Catholic and Methodist worshippers in our congregation) with a regular weekly service pattern catering for all, a situation we want to retain and develop using lay leadership to support and complement our vicar and ministry team. Refreshments always feature after our monthly family communion and all-age services. Festival services are always well-attended.
- \* We have a small resource, such as book/toy bags, to cater for younger members of the congregation (ie under 11s) but perhaps there is a need to examine potential development.
- \* All Saints has a robed choir of six, which in the last couple of years has been the base of a developing community choir led by an experienced musician in the congregation. Members of our congregation join robed choir members to sing special items at Christmas, Easter and Harvest, and featured extensively in a special service to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church's consecration.
- \* We are in the process of upgrading our small, modest, but well-loved pipe organ. It sits in what was once the singers' gallery, where access is difficult to the extent that most potential organists prefer not to use it. We have (after protracted discussions with the diocese) now been given permission to incorporate a remote console in the body of the church, thus doing all we can to ensure that the instrument becomes completely accessible to future organists and prolonging the use of the original instrument. The project is funded by a bequest.



## All Saints today continued

- \* Many of the traditions of the past have not just survived but grown into valued features of the present:-
  - The Redesmere Fete features the unique crowning of a Water Lily Queen which dates back to the mid 1930s. Following updates, it is as enjoyable as ever and celebrated its 80th year in 2023.
  - Our annual display of around 1000 corn dollies made by our late lay reader is a feature of church and village life at Harvest which brings tradition and the present together. Harvest is a major celebration within the church and community, celebrated by a morning eucharist and lay-led evening service with congregations totalling around 150 in 2022. At the other end of the year is the annual blessing of the plough in which the farming families play a significant role.
  - Our annual Service of the Blessing of the Animals has its roots in the 1950s when it attracted interest from way beyond the parish. It was discontinued in the 80s but resurrected a few years ago, and while not attracting the congregations it did originally, it still fits well into All Saints' worship pattern; the 2023 service was attended by 50 people (plus animals!).

- We have, for many years, held an annual Rogation service which starts in church before heading off into the fields, farms and households to bless, and be thankful for, God's creation. A refreshment stop along the way hosted by a local family adds to the opportunity to combine worship with fellowship and appreciation of the environment. The 2023 walk attracted around 40 people of all ages.

- \* We strive to offer an inclusive, welcoming and supportive church community. We are conservative in our approach to faith, and the congregation demonstrates their Christian principles in their daily lives, whether in church or in their links with the community.
- \* All Saints has widespread links with the community via church members who are involved in local organisations such as WI and the village hall. Community life in Siddington is a matrix of which All Saints is an integral part. Two members of the PCC are governors at Marton School, of which the vicar is an ex-officio member.



## Holy Trinity Chapel, Capesthorpe

The chapel is owned by the Bromley-Davenports. It once had its own warden (appointed from Siddington PCC) who had been in post for many years, and was subsequently appointed Warden Emeritus . She is no longer a member of Siddington PCC.

- \* There were once regular public services, but these days three public services are held each year by special arrangement between the incumbent and the family. Until recently one of the Siddington deputy wardens was named as having responsibility for any services at Capesthorpe. (It is hoped to reinstate this practice from the 2024 AGM.) Some members of the choir and congregation from Siddington support the public services.
- \* Arrangements for services and events such as wedding blessings are made directly between the hall staff and various individuals of their choosing.



### 3. Where does the parish want to be in 2026?

Please note that this and the next section were written before the new vicar's appointment. Their input will be welcomed as soon as feasible.

#### Vision

With 500 years of history combined with an excitement for the future, the Siddington parish is looking forward to the next three years with confidence.

The vision for 2026 is to be an even stronger rural community that embraces opportunities to grow, cares for all in need and attracts an all-age congregation with a culture that is firmly based on Christian principles.

#### Objectives

Siddington has three key goals for 2026 in addition to those common across the benefice:

- To have implemented a strategic planning process with three year cycles and annual reviews, led by our new vicar.
- To have maintained, as a minimum, the currently healthy parish finances.
- To have supported the growth and development of the wider benefice.

#### Areas of focus 2023-26

##### ● *Strategic Planning Process*

To achieve the goals for 2026 and beyond, the parish will need to focus both on the need to change and the need to preserve timeless but still highly relevant ecclesiastical and communal traditions and practices.

##### ● *Healthy Finances*

Led by our astute treasurer, the parish lives within its means by ensuring that expenditure is, at worst, equal to income and thereby cash is preserved. Some of the latter is being used to fund the exciting organ resiting and renovations so, to be able to facilitate the above projects, more income would be welcome and fresh opportunities will be explored.



## 4. How is All Saints going to get there?

The achievement of its 2026 objectives is a tough challenge for the Siddington parish but one that is readily accepted. Fortunately, several building blocks are already in place and these will provide the foundations for further progress.

### ● *Leadership*

To maximize the chances of successful change and development in the period 2023-2026, the parish will build on the proven strengths of the PCC. Hopefully, a strategic planning process for the future can be put in place but obviously, this may be dependent on the appointment of a new vicar who will bring their own ideas for the development of the parish.

### ● *Teamwork*

Team Siddington is already one of the parish's most valuable assets as demonstrated every year, amongst many other activities, by the famous Redesmere Fete when the whole community comes together for a most rewarding and worthwhile day.

Adding the projects to improve pastoral care and to increase congregation numbers will test tight resources to the limit but the team has a liking for new challenges and is confident of success.

### ● *Development Funding*

In addition to maintaining and, hopefully, developing the financially successful Redesmere Fete, extra funding will be generated in the next three years from three potential sources:

- An increase in giving from an enlarged congregation.
- An increase in regular parishioners giving by standing order (currently 43%).
- A promotional program to increase the volume of weddings, christenings etc.

### ● *Supporting the Benefice Development*

Siddington would happily contribute to a benefice system of support for any parish experiencing difficulties which could be augmented by other parishes on a case by case basis.



# Christ Church, Eaton with St Michael's Church, Hulme Walfield

## 1. History and background of the parish

**From the top of the hill, Christ Church, the parish church of Eaton with Hulme Walfield, looks down on the centre of the village of Eaton. Its position rises from the rich valley of the river Dane, fringed by the Cheshire hills.**

- \* Consecrated in 1857, the church is very pretty, with beautiful stained glass, oak fixtures and a working organ. With seating for up to 120 people, its size, situation and friendly atmosphere mean it is very popular for celebrating weddings, with not only local people but also those who come from outside the parish. We see people move away from the parish who continue with their links to the church and still worship there.
- \* Where the parsonage once stood, there is space enough for the village garden party and for parking. The former stable block is the very popular and useful Eaton with Hulme Walfield Parish Hall. Over the road is a large and well-used playground, a great village amenity.
- \* St Michael's, Hulme Walfield is a majestic church, once thriving, built to serve the communities of Hulme Walfield and Somerford Booths. The joint parish was created out of that of Astbury. Consecrated in 1856, the building has many Arts and Crafts features and a

working organ. It has a very welcoming feel, and is largely in good order with restricted funds for the building and churchyard maintenance. Since the adjacent vicarage was sold, the only parking spaces are on the road. The Church Commissioners own land opposite but planning permission for parking was unfortunately refused after an extensive review before 2020.

- \* St Michael's Church is now the daughter church of Eaton with Hulme Walfield Parish.
- \* Twenty years ago, the first of a number of housing estates was built within the parish, and over the past five years, another 700+ homes have been constructed. We can estimate that the population has doubled with only a handful of people from the estates becoming regular worshippers at Eaton, but unfortunately none engaged with St Michael's. Approximately 700 more homes will be built in the next seven years, with additional planning permissions being requested.



## 2. Christ Church and St Michael's today

**Christ Church has a regular service every Sunday, joining with the benefice on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the month. There are lots of special services, generally held on Sundays, such as Plough Sunday, Easter, Harvest, Remembrance, and the Carol Service. During Lent, there is a series of Wednesday evening services held in a group of churches in rotation, some of which are part of the Rural Daneside Benefice. We very much enjoy welcoming people who usually worship elsewhere.**

- \* The Eaton congregation attendance naturally suffered after the Covid pandemic and took a while to recover. The increasing numbers are now reflected in the financial report for the year.
- \* We have maintained our core members from the older people to the very young. We are really humbled and pleased to see new members joining our congregation either regularly or occasionally. We believe our traditional yet modern values and welcoming behaviours will continue to attract new members.
- \* The congregation of Hulme Walfield has been dwindling for a long time. It struggled to recover since Covid and a number of the congregation have died. They have unfortunately not managed to attract a younger congregation, despite some promising advances over seven years ago.
- \* The building of St Michael's is by far the largest in the benefice, so could support larger services and

functions but there is the limitation of on-road parking only.

- \* A recent decision was taken to share monthly family communion services with St Peter's, Swettenham, held in alternate churches and this is working well. Two traditional annual services at St Michael's are very popular, the Christingle, on Advent Sunday, and the Crib Service, the latter being congregation-led.
- \* Both churches use their organs, with the option of pre-recorded music for weddings and funerals, even, occasionally, for services. In recent years, efforts have been made to bring the Eaton music more up to date, with 'baby steps'. The challenge is that many people derive comfort from and like to sing the familiar, while some like the modern and up-beat.



## Christ Church and St Michael's today continued

- \* Last year we started to undertake a programme of repair to the fabric of both churches, which will ensure that the basic structure of the buildings will be good enough to become the start for future improvements. This will be greatly informed by the Quinquennial Reports due this year.
- \* Since early 2023, two sisters have been running monthly "Coffee and Company" sessions in the parish hall. By doing this independently, not under the auspices of the PCC, and without charge, they have encouraged many people to drop in for a chat who don't attend church and who may therefore have few opportunities to meet others. Some come from neighbouring villages. These mornings are always buzzing and this would be an ideal place for our new vicar to meet local residents who don't necessarily come to church services.
- \* The parish hall is the scene of many church activities, such as harvest lunches, and fundraising events. Local secular groups use it regularly, and it is available for hire for parties and other social events, which provide useful income for the parish. The 1st Eaton and Hulme

Walfield Brownies and Eaton WI are two examples of regular groups that use it.

- \* Our annual fete is known as the garden party. It is quickly regaining its place in village life following the lifting of Covid restrictions, with income in 2023 being a record.
- \* A small but hard-working committee of village people, the Eaton Village Amenities Fund, reflects the community spirit. They supported the development of the parish hall and continue to support local charities. They provide social events that bring the community together for meals, race nights, and carol singing, working sometimes with the church or the village pub, the Plough Inn.



### 3. Where does the parish want to be in 2026?

The two churches of the parish are quite different from each other. Christ Church is a small, classical, country church, with its own village, while St Michael's is much bigger within the smaller village of Hulme Walfield. Between them, are the greatly growing, new housing estates, within the joint parish. This means that the parish is quite different although complements the others within the benefice.

- \* The new housing is mainly owner-occupied, with a very high percentage of employment. We hope that, particularly Eaton will be a place where new residents, who are often from much larger towns can join the existing residents, many with a long history of and links to farming, to worship. We would like to see an increase in the numbers who are willing to play a part in church life.
- \* We have the opportunity to demonstrate how we are forward-looking yet maintaining and keeping alive our traditional Church of England values.
- \* We have had an extremely encouraging and productive response recently with the wedding fayre at the nearby Plough Inn. We need to develop this mutually advantageous relationship.



## 4. How is the parish going to get there?

**It is very important for people to feel physically and spiritually comfortable in the church environment. The congregation is looking forward to enjoying the warmth supplied by a new heating system installed in June 2023. We will continue to offer refreshments after some services, to encourage people to feel welcome and make friends.**

- \* In 2018, a project was undertaken to attract people to Christ Church and St Michael's Christmas events and services. A card was delivered to every house in the parish, and, as a result, Christ Church was overflowing for the carol service. This demonstrates that this kind of church publicity to our local community can be very successful.
- \* We would like to develop a children's ministry and would look to the new vicar to help us achieve this. Its focus would be the All Ages Service, where we will explore the possibility of bringing back our two retired lay readers, who are very experienced in working with children. A member of the congregation, who is herself a young parent, is interested in looking into new ways to draw in families with children, and she may be encouraged to take the lead. By working with Marton School, and even Eaton Bank High School, we could communicate with families and encourage them to participate.
- \* Changes that we envisage include moving occasional services into the larger space of the parish hall. At the same time, we must ensure that our current congregation is retained.
- \* In our congregation we have members from the Cheshire Young Farmers Association. A closer tie with them will encourage the younger generation to be involved.
- \* The fabric of Eaton church has deteriorated over the last 166 years. We need to start a fundraising programme to address the cost of future upkeep of this beautiful parish church.



# St Peter's Church, Swettenham

## 1. History and background of the parish

**The rural Parish of Swettenham is formed by three townships of Swettenham, Kermincham and Davenport and the name Swettenham comes from the Saxon word meaning "sweet home".**

- \* Our church is dedicated to St Peter, probably because the ancient wakes were held between the 12th and 18th of June, the latter date being the old St Peter's Day. Early evidence of Christian activity on the site dates back to a Saxon sandstone cross discovery on the site in the 19th Century.
- \* The church can be first dated from around 1260 with major reconstructions in 1772 and 1848 to give the present mix of architectural styles that we enjoy today. The Church has a bell tower with three bells and a working clock that has undergone extensive renovation in recent years.
- \* Inside the church there is a modern Mander organ dating from 1864 which is played to the congregation's enjoyment at services. There are three doors into the church and above the north door is the Mainwaring crest of an ass' head, the Mainwarings being a family who lived in the village during the first crusades.
- \* The parish has a population of approximately 290, mainly adults, with a few families. Many residents are well known to each other although neighbours maybe well spaced apart in this farming community. Generally, if you come to live in Swettenham you tend to stay for a while.
- \* In the past we have formed benefices under the direction of the Diocese of Chester, with Brereton, followed by Goostrey until 2018 when we forged our current link with the Rural Daneside group. We feel this latest organisational structure works well as it links the rural populations of the five parishes.
- \* In 2021 James Balme made a video of our church for Cheshire Life  
[Exploring the history of Swettenham in Cheshire.](#)



## 2. Where is the parish today?

**We are a small, very friendly and welcoming rural parish church with strong roots. Services may be small, but the community is close. There is a sense of ownership of the parish by a good proportion of the congregation, people get on well. Despite having a strong sense of tradition, we are open to new ideas. As we are a good fit with the other parishes in the benefice it makes us all stronger when we work together.**

- \* The church is the centre of parish life with popular meeting places at The Swettenham Club and The Swettenham Arms. Our local economy is predominately made up of farming families, small businesses and a pub. At The Swettenham Club many social activities are hosted e.g. bowls, dominoes, pool and darts. The Church's symbiotic relationship with the Club brings revenue to the Club through the bar and is a significant fundraising site for the church e.g., 'Famous' Shrove Tuesday pancake day, plough and harvest suppers.
- \* We are fortunate to have The Swettenham Arms as a neighbour because they allow us to share their car park and use the toilet facilities. It also benefits the Arms as a convenient place for a post service drink!
- \* Our Parochial Church Council (PCC) meets four times a year. We also find the Wardens Plus meetings very helpful networking sessions which strengthen the benefice ties.
- \* The church is financially stable and we have paid our Parish Share on time and in full since 2016. Fundraising events at The Swettenham Club and with local parishioners e.g. refreshments at Rowley House Gardens open days and Clonter Opera car boot sales help engage Swettenham and surrounding villagers to support the church. These events together with generous donations enabled installation of a much needed new and efficient reliable heating system for the church in 2019. The Quinquennial Report continues to be work in progress and the PCC are confident this will be achieved.



### 3. Where does the parish want to be in 2026?

**The Church is its people and by 2026 we would like to build further connections with our fellow churchgoers across the benefice in their journey of faith.**

- \* We would like to build links with our village neighbours and families, so they know that the fellowship of the church is there to welcome them when they need it.
- \* We would like to embrace Bishop Mark's Diocesan vision process; keeping things simple and asking what difference this is going to make to the parishioners in our parish.
- \* We would like to encourage members of the PCC to attend more, if possible all meetings to enable better

understanding and achievement of the church's goals and ambitions.

- \* We would like to raise sufficient funds to install a small kitchen area to serve hot drinks after services and a toilet to make the church more welcoming to its parishioners and visitors. This may help the church achieve its goal to increase the size of the congregation.



### 4. How is the parish going to get there?

**Teamwork in the benefice is essential to achieve our 2026 ambitions.**

- \* Introduce a wider variety of activities and services that are integrated between the whole benefice. This approach may motivate members of the parishes to participate with ideas and accept change.
- \* Improve participation in Swettenham PCC meetings.
- \* Explore how PCC meetings could be improved.
- \* Seek alternative ways to hold and undertake PCC meetings e.g. hold them online or after a church service, change the meeting format and reporting style.

- \* Financial planning:
  - Form a team to undertake a feasibility study - is a kitchen and toilet possible?;
  - Identify congregants who may have skills to help the projects to reduce cost;
  - Draw up plans for the work and cost the project(s);
  - Identify how we can raise the finance; and
  - Define the project(s) timescale.

