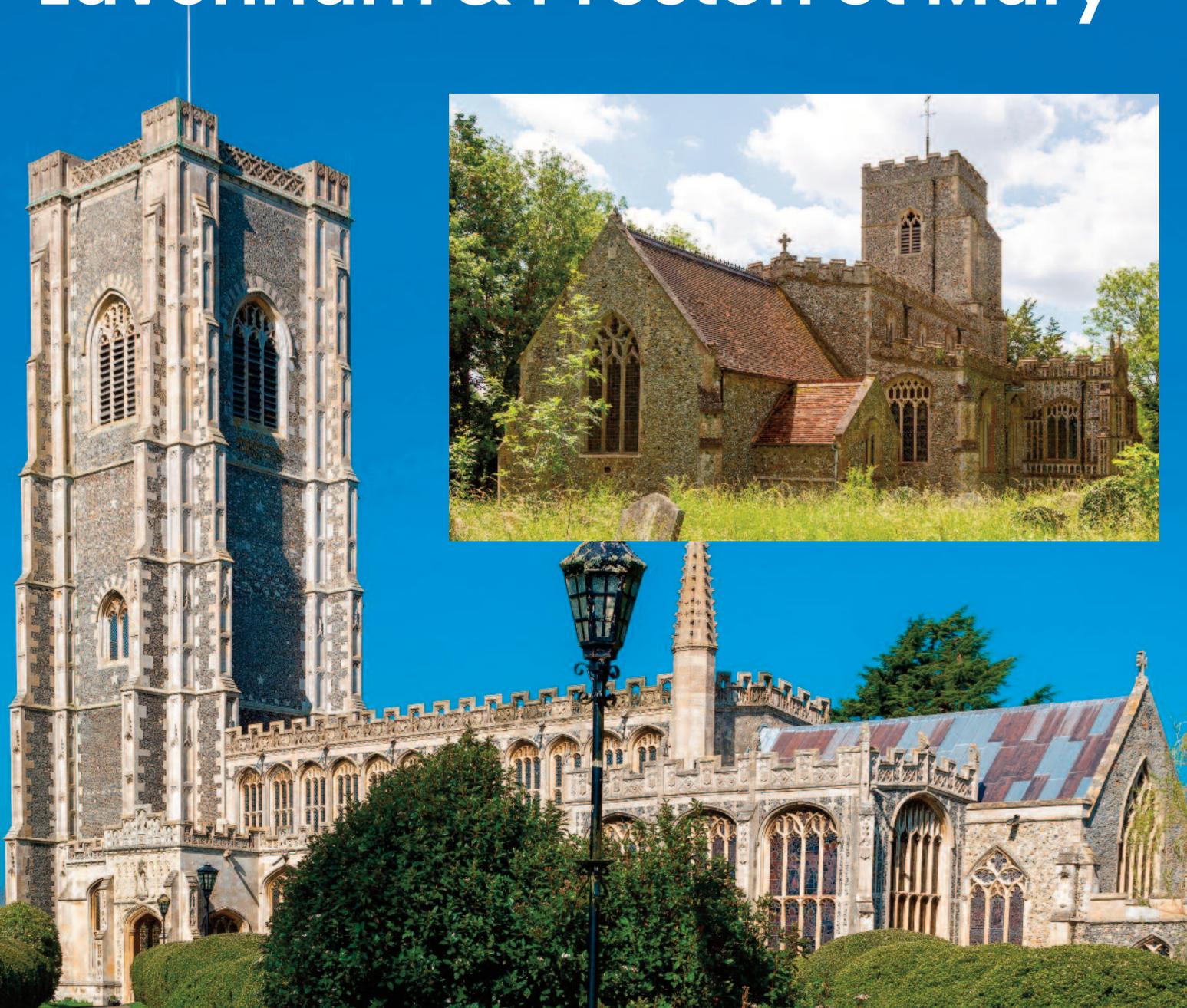


Rector of the Benefice of Lavenham & Preston St Mary



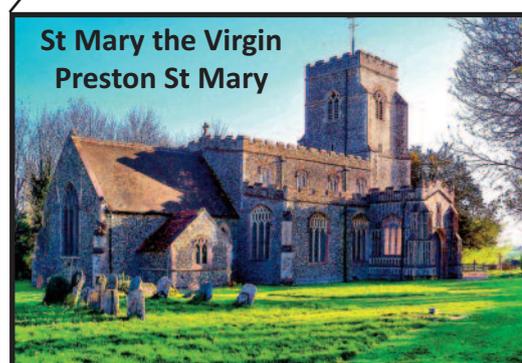
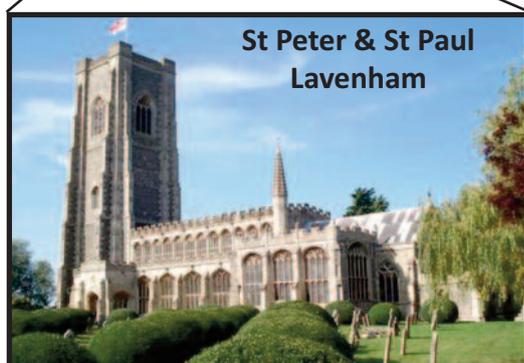
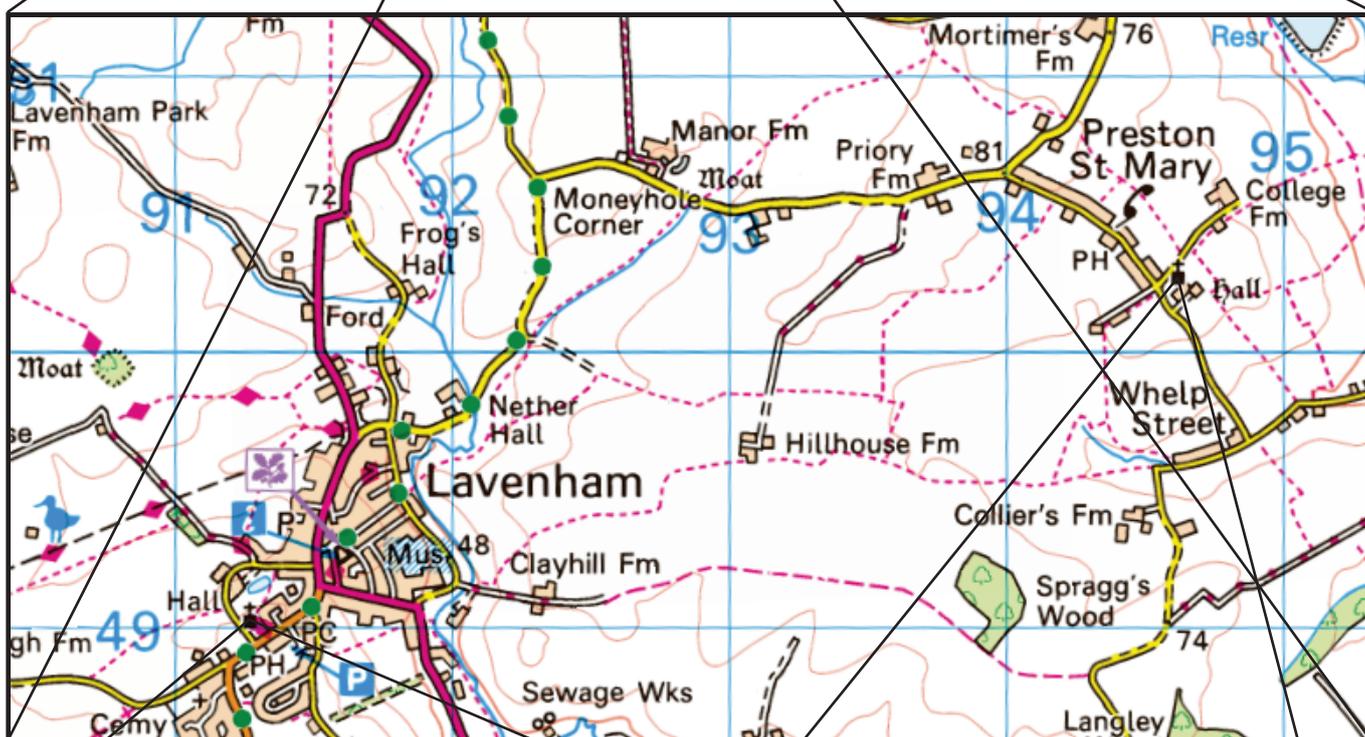
**St Peter & St Paul Lavenham with
St Mary the Virgin Preston St Mary**



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of St Edmundsbury
and Ipswich

September 2022

The Benefice



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Ministry Team

The new Rector will have the support of the Assistant Curate and the Reader, as well as a small group who meet bi-monthly as a Ministry Team, including the Director of Music and the Children and Families Co-ordinator.

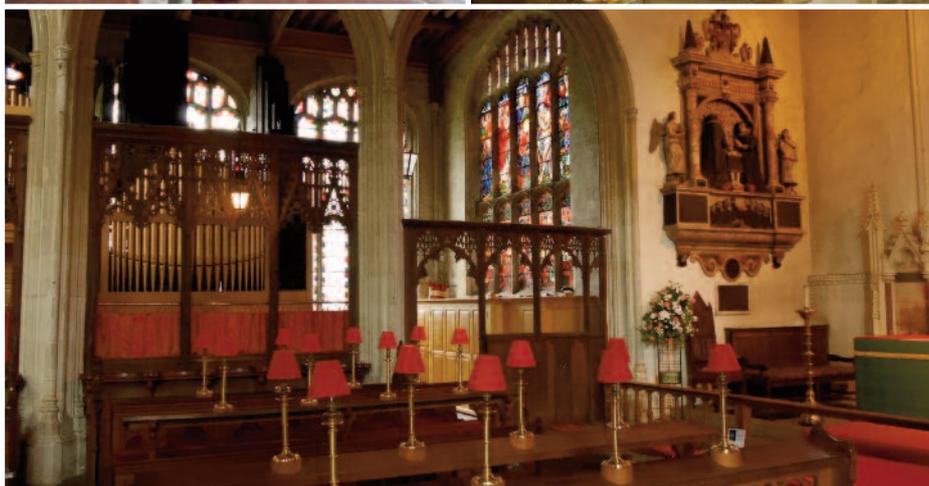


The Benefice has a strong history as a training parish, and our current Curate, **Revd Graham Naylor**, was ordained priest in June 2021. Graham has previously held positions as churchwarden and organist at other churches, and has been

associated with the Benefice since October 2018, having been on placement here before starting as curate.

Pete Postle was licensed as a Reader in 2001 in Devon, and was licensed to this benefice in 2014.

There is also other lay assistance, including a small team of licensed Communion Assistants, a Home Visiting team, and a strong Children and Families team who organise children's events during school holidays and occasional 'Open the Book' sessions in Lavenham School.



An Invitation to Join Us

Thank you for your interest in this vacancy which arises as a result of the retirement of our Rector, the Revd Stephen Earl, after 12 years of ministry within the Benefice. We are grateful to Stephen and Abi for their valued service and wish them health and happiness as they embark on their retirement adventure.

We are looking for a Rector who will lead our Benefice into the future, partnering with us to extend our ministry and to meet the challenges that lie before us.

We would like our new priest to:

- be a leader with a confident personal faith and spirituality that he or she is able to share with others, encouraging us in our own ministry and in new initiatives;
- stimulate us by preaching and teaching;
- challenge us in both thought and actions;
- be a visible presence who is actively involved in our communities;
- lead us in providing pastoral care to all age groups within the local community, especially the isolated and elderly;
- cheerfully support us in our fundraising and community events;
- be liturgically sensitive in leading traditional choral worship whilst being flexible so that different forms of services can be valued and helped to develop.

Our parishes offer:

- an exciting and challenging opportunity to lead a Christian community in a varied rural benefice;
- experience at shouldering some of the administrative duties and assistance with work/life balance;
- some lay ministry which we are keen to develop further;
- support, care and friendship;
- participation in worship, welcome and service, and openness to try new things;
- a supportive deanery chapter.

Whilst sensitive to our historic legacy, we look forward to the future, and pray for the inspiration and leadership of the person God calls to work with us.

We would like to consider ways to enhance our worship, become a more visible and caring presence in the community, make our church buildings more accessible and support outreach to those living in our Benefice and the many tourists that visit our churches.

The following pages seek to complete the picture of this very special Suffolk benefice.

Person Specification...

Members of the congregations and the wider community were asked what they felt were the essential and desirable skills that our new Rector should possess, and what type of work they hope he or she will undertake. The resulting feedback highlighted the following qualities that we hope you will have, and what we feel are some of the challenges and opportunities that you will face.

Spiritual and Personal Qualities

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is an overwhelming desire that our new Rector should be someone who

- is firm and sincere in their personal faith and spiritual practice, with a sure and deep belief in Jesus Christ as Saviour and a fervent desire to serve God;
- is willing and able to work with us to spread the Gospel message;
- is committed to developing the gifts and talents of those within the church;
- is an apt teacher with good communication and listening skills;
- is liturgically sensitive to traditional Anglican worship whilst being open to explore other forms of service;
- enjoys being with people and has the ability to relate well to people of all ages, backgrounds, ethnicities and faiths;
- has a caring nature and a good sense of humour.

Pastoral Skills

Pastoral work is regarded as very important, and whilst appreciating that the task of home visiting cannot be exclusively the task of the Rector, we place

high value on time spent by the Rector and Curate visiting those who are old, unwell, lonely or recently bereaved and taking home communion to housebound church members. We hope that our Rector will be keen to support and develop the existing Pastoral Support Group.

Leadership Skills

The Churches in Lavenham and Preston St Mary have effective and keen PCCs. We hope that our new Rector will inject his or her vision for the benefice in a way that draws on individuals' strengths, and ensures that PCC members and our wider congregations can visualise a flourishing and sustainable future for the whole community.

We hope that our Rector will have good organisational skills and IT skills, and a willingness to embrace and develop our current use of technology, both in worship and administration.

Reaching Out

We recognise that flourishing churches add new people to their congregations by outreach and by attracting those who move into the area.

If our congregations are to grow in number we need to engage our neighbours in the hope that a greater sense of belonging will lead to believing.

Our churches attract mainly people who are retired and have a professional background. We feel that we are failing to reach:

- residents living in social housing and council accommodation;
- those in the 30–55 age group;
- children, young people and teenagers within the community.

We hope that our Rector will help us to grow younger and more diverse.

Our beautiful and historic church buildings are clearly valued by those living in the Benefice and we are committed to preserving them in good condition for current and future generations to enjoy. However, we hope our Rector will help us to explore how to make them more welcoming places so that they can be used to engage our communities more fully.



Easter Craft Activities

...Challenges and Opportunities

The Wider Community

We are looking to appoint someone who likes people and who wants to take an active role within our communities. Our new Rector should have a strong pastoral ministry be willing and able to get out and about in Lavenham and Preston St Mary, meeting people and becoming a recognised and well-known presence, and thereby drawing people to the church and increasing our visibility in the community.

We hope our Rector will take an active part in community activities, and become involved with the school and other societies and organisations within the Benefice.

Church Tradition

While it is important to maintain the liturgical excellence of our current services, we are also open to developing and promoting less formal forms of worship.

We recognise that as the only Anglican church in Lavenham we must provide a variety of forms of worship, and that as a benefice of two rather different churches our Rector can help us to improve the ways in which we work together as a team, so that both church centres are used to best advantage.

Although we have no wish to undertake wholesale changes, there are clearly opportunities for the new incumbent to vary the current service pattern and to introduce alternative styles of worship that may draw in those who are currently unchurched.

There is some feeling that our services could benefit from a degree of rethinking. For example, on the third Sunday of the month all three services within the Benefice celebrate Holy Communion; the office of Morning Prayer is not currently celebrated within the Benefice and Evensong is celebrated only at Preston St Mary.

At Preston St Mary, Preston Praise is lay-led, and we anticipate that this will continue with the support and encouragement of the new Rector.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taken its toll on our congregations – during lockdowns we have held services by Zoom. When we resumed services in church at Easter 2021, the facility to join by Zoom was maintained until January 2022, when most people were happy to return in person. Unfortunately, our congregations are only around 75% of what they were pre-COVID. We hope that our Rector will assist us to add to our number.

Music is an important element of our worship. There is a robed choir at Lavenham, and we have plans to

start a junior choir, whilst there is a less formal pop-up choir at Preston St Mary. The Director of Music looks forward to working with the Rector in the planning and development of worship and liturgy.

Youth and Family Work

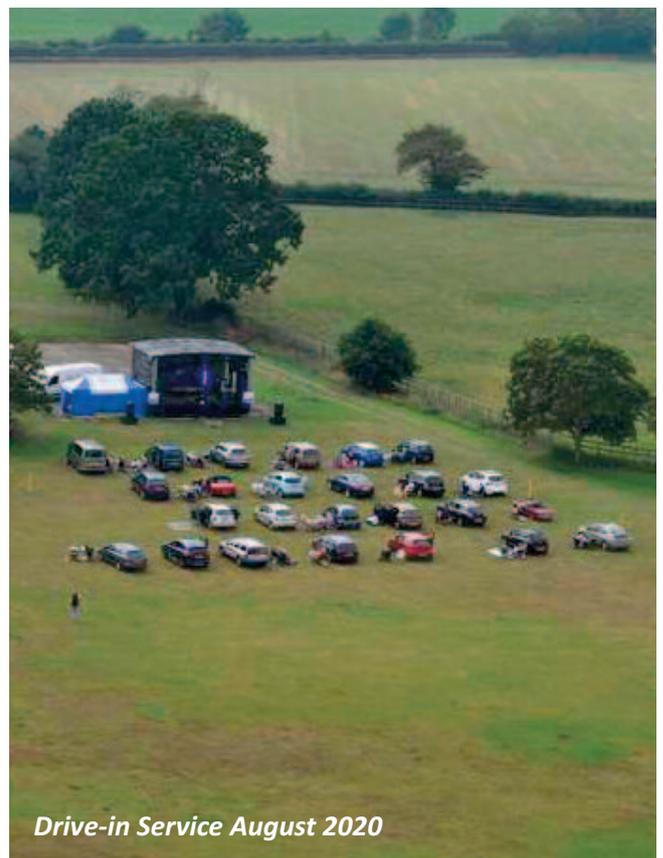
Work with children, young people and families is an area that needs to be encouraged. Some valuable initiatives have been started and developed over the last few years, largely the work of the current curate and the small but dedicated Children and Families Team, and the input of the new Rector will be especially welcome.

We need to consider how younger people can be encouraged to attend the church, whether as part of existing service provision or in new ways, as we are an older than average community

Teaching and Education

The church currently provides little opportunity for those seeking to explore the Christian faith, the monthly 'Think and Drink' being the only such group, and we expect that our new Rector will help us to develop in this area.

We look to our Rector to encourage the church and wider community, by example, teaching and direction, to grow in godliness and to fulfil God's calling on our lives.



Drive-in Service August 2020

Living in Lavenham

The population of Lavenham is currently estimated to be about 1880 – however a housing development of 25 dwellings presently nearing completion is expected to increase this by 50+. Latest available statistics indicate that 13% are aged under 19yrs; 47% 20-64yrs and 40% 65yrs and over. About 85% were born in the UK and 90% are of white ethnicity. Only a small number, around 15%, were born in the town.

Thus compared with the national and district averages the age profile is significantly tilted towards the older age groups and the retired. In recent years the town has attracted a number of professional and creative people who live alongside a mix of skilled and unskilled workers of all ages – some directly or indirectly supporting Lavenham’s tourist industry or employed in nearby towns.

In the early post-war period two large estates of council houses were constructed, many of which are now in private ownership. In the past quarter-century a significant number of small modern housing developments have taken place on brownfield sites and on farm land.

Heritage

In the early medieval period most of the parish consisted of a deer park, property of the Earls of Oxford (converted to arable and pasture in the late 16th century). During this time the town developed into a prosperous and famous centre of wool-cloth

manufacture but suffered a period of decline in the 17th and 18th centuries. However there was a revival of industrial activity in the Victorian period which survived well into the 20th century – most notably horse-hair and silk weaving, coconut matting manufacture, straw plaiting and later light industry such as metal casting/fabrication and printing. Many of the medieval timber framed buildings (some ‘Georgianised’ with later frontages) and later Victorian cottages and factories (the latter now converted to domestic use) survive to give Lavenham a rare and attractive legacy of past centuries which is a mecca for tourists, not just from Britain, but from around the world.

Until quite recently the surrounding land was devoted to mixed farming, arable and dairy/beef production and the town had all the ancillary activities such as blacksmithing, leather working, butchers, inns etc to make Lavenham largely self-sufficient. Since WWII the mechanisation of farming has led to a much-reduced labour-force with most of the land in arable production, although some remaining pasture survives for sheep rearing and just a few cattle.

Facilities, Clubs and Organisations

Lavenham has a good range of facilities, including two hotels, five restaurants, three pubs, five cafes/tea houses, library, three grocers, a baker, butcher, pharmacy, post office (staffed by volunteers), two





museums, two hairdressers/beauty salons and a regular bus service to Bury St Edmunds, Sudbury and Long Melford.

There is a wide variety of clubs and societies, many of which meet in the large modern Village Hall (built on leased church land), the medieval Guildhall, sheltered housing, the Primary School as well as the Community Council Recreation Ground (for tennis, cricket and football) and open-access meadows (including children's play equipment).

Activities include Art Society; Authors' Group; Badminton; Ballroom Dancing; Bird Club; British Legion Club; Carpet Bowls Club; Cubs/Scouts & Beavers; Junior Football Club; Gardening Club; Lawn Tennis Club; Natural History Group; Rambling Club; Table Tennis Club; Theatre Group.

Schools

There is a pre-school, on church land adjacent to the Village Hall, with modern premises for about twenty-four 2–4 year olds, and a Community Primary School serving Lavenham and the surrounding villages housed in a fine Victorian school building, presently with 120 pupils (43 at Key Stage 1 and 77 at Key Stage 2). From age 12 almost all children go to Thomas Gainsborough School which is an Academy located in the nearby town of Sudbury.

Other Worshipping Communities

in addition to the Anglican Parish Church, in days gone by, Lavenham had Baptist, Congregational, Primitive

and Wesleyan Methodist churches, but all closed in the last century leaving just the Salvation Army with its own meeting hall. Roman Catholics travel for Mass to the nearby town of Sudbury (7 miles) or Clare Priory (11 miles). Sudbury also has Methodist, Baptist, Salvation Army and Evangelical Chapels which, together with Lavenham, are affiliated to 'Churches Together in Sudbury & District', which has more than 25 member churches. Also in Sudbury is an active Society of Friends (Quaker) Meeting House.

As the only two Christian communities in Lavenham, the Parish Church and the Salvation Army jointly publish *Lavenham Life*, which is a monthly magazine, widely read in the town, and the Rector is a member of its editorial board.

Role of the Church within the Community

The Parish Church primarily provides a focus for Christian worship, its membership being mainly composed of local residents but with a small number of people from other local communities. The building itself dates from two main periods, 14th and 15/16th centuries and is Grade I listed. Its large size and excellent acoustics make it an attractive and valuable venue for music concerts of all descriptions. It is a visitor attraction for many thousands of tourists each year.

Worship

The normal pattern of worship in the Benefice is as follows:

Sunday

8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP said)	Lavenham	1st & 3rd Sundays	attendance approx 10
10.15am	Benefice Eucharist (CW sung)	Lavenham	except 1st Sunday	attendance 35–50
10.15am	Morning Worship (sung)	Lavenham	1st Sunday	attendance 35–50
12 noon	Preston Praise (Informal lay-led)	Preston St Mary	1st Sunday	attendance approx 11
6.00pm	Evensong (BCP with music)	Preston St Mary	2nd & 4th Sundays	attendance approx 9
6.00pm	Holy Communion (BCP sung)	Preston St Mary	3rd Sunday	attendance approx 9

Wednesday

10.00am	Holy Communion (CW trad said)	Lavenham		attendance approx 10
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Electoral Roll and Attendance – Figures relate to 2021 (*with approximate pre-COVID figures in brackets)

	Lavenham	Preston St Mary
Number of households/residents	1156/1886	99/180
Church Electoral Roll	136	29
Average weekly attendance ('standard' services)	60 (*80)	10 (*12)
Carol Service attendance	110 (*150)	80 (*190)
Christmas Midnight Communion attendance	93 (*130)	
Easter Day attendance	56 (*150)	17 (*33) – Sunrise service
Remembrance Day attendance	106 (*300)	
Number of Weddings (2021)	6	occasional
Number of Baptisms (2021)	5	occasional
Number of Funerals (2021)	13	2/3

The recent disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to assess the future level of attendance at our services. Figures for 2021, and also those for 2020 were diminished both by the lockdown closures and by a reluctance to return to normal by a number of our elderly parishioners.

We can compare 2021 with the years up to 2019, and that shows a clear decline in attendances. We will look to our new Rector to help us inspire and encourage people to help us grow again.

Lavenham

While we aspire to honour the splendid cathedral-like nature of Lavenham Church, we recognise that it is a parish church, and that being the only place of Anglican worship in the town it must accommodate a range of churchmanship, its worship sits comfortably as 'middle-of-the-road' in tradition.

On Sundays, services of Holy Communion are celebrated at the High Altar at 8.00am and alternate between the High Altar and a Nave Altar at the 10.15am services. On Wednesdays, Holy Communion is celebrated in The Lady Chapel. Refreshments are served after the 10.15am service on Sundays, and after the 10am service on Wednesdays.

Prior to 2016 all services in the weekly pattern celebrated the eucharist. While it is important to provide a eucharist service at Lavenham each Sunday, we recognise the need to offer opportunities for alternative forms of worship which will be relevant to families and our wider community.

As a first move towards this, the 10.15am service on the first Sunday of the month is given over to Morning Worship.

The need for alternative strategies is clearly demonstrated by the fact that in 2010, when the vacancy was last advertised, attendance at the main Sunday service was 60–100, whereas the current congregation averages 35–50, although we realise that this is partly related to the COVID pandemic.

The festivals of Ash Wednesday and Ascension Day are celebrated with a communion service, and Maundy Thursday is celebrated with an evening communion service including the washing of feet and the stripping of the altars. On Good Friday, a 'Last Hour' service of reflection is held between 2pm and 3pm, and often an evening 'Come and Sing' musical performance of works such as The Messiah, The Crucifixion or Fauré's Requiem.

The Patronal Festival of Peter & Paul is celebrated with a communion service on the first Sunday in July.

Harvest Festival is usually celebrated with a Morning Worship service on the first Sunday in October. On Remembrance Sunday, wreaths are laid at the memorial in the Market Place, followed by a parade of military and youth organisations to the church for a 10.15am service, including the two-minute silence at 11am.

A service of Nine Lessons and Carols is usually held on the Sunday before Christmas, with a Crib Service and Midnight Communion on Christmas Eve and a family-oriented Communion service on Christmas Day.

The church has always supported a strong musical tradition, but eight years ago it lost its choir following the departure of the Director of Music. Since that time, the subsequent Director of Music has been able to build up a new choir from scratch, and this work has been continued by the current post-holder over the last two years. Currently, the choir numbers about 9/10, and they sing for the 10.15am services.

The music at those services includes hymns (we use *New English Hymnal* and *BBC Songs of Praise*, but regularly also include hymns from other sources as appropriate, printed on a weekly hymn sheet), a Responsorial Psalm and a choir anthem. At Morning Worship, which is based loosely on Common Worship, the psalm is often sung using the traditional words and anglican chant, as is the canticle.

Preston St Mary

By contrast to Lavenham, the church at Preston St Mary is more intimate in its beauty, a quiet place of pilgrimage where the countryside blends with the churchyard.

On the first Sunday of the month, the Preston Praise service begins with coffee and croissants, followed by an informal lay-led service. Members of the PCC take it in turns to lead the prayers and speak on a theme of their choice. This is a very popular service, which is also attended by a number of people from outside the parish.

Holy Communion (third Sunday) and Evensong (second and fourth Sundays) are BCP services, with hymns chosen from *Hymns Old and New* (1986 edition).

As well as the Preston Pop-up Choir, which has been so successful and enjoyable for the village, the church has formed the St Mary's Singers which is a small group of local voices to sing anthems and songs of praise, usually at the Preston Praise service but also at other times in the church calendar. These musical groups are very well received, and the church has often been a venue for concerts by local choirs and musicians.

Our Christmas carol service is a fundamental part of the church's activities. Children are central to this service and encouraged to take part in a specially written play which is very much enjoyed. Easter services include a People's Passion on Good Friday when residents take part with singing, reading or playing music, and a Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday at which a fire is lit and the congregation is treated to celebratory Buck's Fizz and bacon rolls afterwards.

Other special services include Rogation when, after the service in church the congregation repairs to a local farm where, thanks to the generous hospitality of a local farming family, the fields are walked and the crops blessed. Afterwards everyone enjoys a barbecue. Our annual Patronal service, with an invited speaker is followed by lunch for everyone and the Harvest Festival service and meal are well supported.

Our policy since we joined the Lavenham Benefice in 1995 has been to hold services on special festival days and at different times (plenty of evening services) in order to complement rather than clash or compete with Lavenham. That has served us well, and as a proportion of the population of the Parish our attendances have been higher than many other parishes.

We have a service every Sunday, except for very rare occasions when there is a joint Benefice service in Lavenham to celebrate a special festival, and the figures of 11 and 9 for Preston Praise and other Sunday services compare to an average of 18 and 11.5 before the pandemic.

Our Christmas Eve Carol Service in 2021 attracted a number of children, of whom very few live in Preston. We have built a reputation here and in other local parishes for our music and inclusion of children's stories and activities in this service. It is probably the only time apart from Baptisms and Weddings that we see children in church.

The Good Friday lay-led People's Passion was attended by 17 in 2021, against a pre lockdown average of 21. Rogation Sunday is well-attended, with 40+ in 2022, but averaging 50-70 pre-COVID.

Other 'specials' including Patronal Festival, Harvest, Remembrance, Candlemas and Advent Carols were all attended by over 20 last year but have in recent years exceeded that figure comfortably.

We in Preston hope that our new Rector will lead and support us in recovering the spirit and enthusiasm that we have worked to build over the last quarter century.

The Rectory



The Rectory was built in 1980 by a local company according to the brief set out by the Church Commissioners in The Design of Clergy Housing. The house has an entrance hall with access to the study independent of the living quarters. There is a large living room, a separate dining room, kitchen, utility room and downstairs WC. Upstairs there are four bedrooms, a bathroom with shower and a separate WC.

Ground Floor

Entering through a UPVC front door into:

Entrance Hallway

A spacious area with tiled flooring, coat hooks and door giving access to:

Study 13'10" x 12'2" (4.21m x 3.70m)



North and South. An excellent size study, with window to the front and French doors leading out to the rear garden.

A further door from the entrance hall leads into the:

Main Hallway

A spacious area with stairs to the first floor and doors to:

WC

Fitted with low flush WC, wall mounted wash hand basin and alcove shelving.

Kitchen 13'10" x 9'1" (4.21m x 2.76m)



East. Fitted with a good range of base and eye level kitchen units with formica roll top work surface over inset with a one and a half bowl single drainer stainless steel sink. Space and wiring for electric cooker. Space and plumbing for dishwasher. Space for fridge/freezer. Door leads into

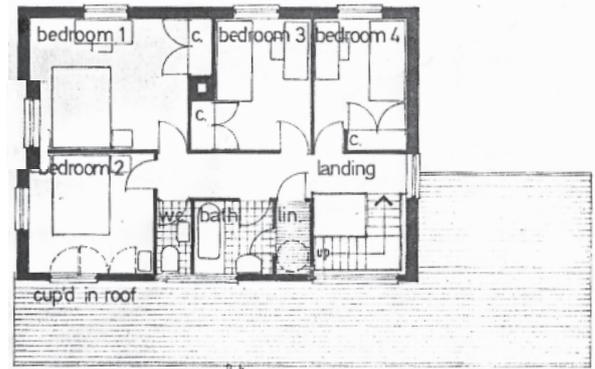
Utility Room 13'11" x 5'9" (4.24m x 1.75m max)

A useful room with a range of fitted cupboards, also incorporating section of work surface and a single bowl single drainer stainless steel sink. Space and plumbing for washing machine. Ideal gas fired boiler serving full central heating. Glazed door leading to the side courtyard.

Ground Floor



First Floor



A further door from the kitchen leads through to the:

Dining Room 13'11 x 12'5 (4.24m x 3.78m)

East and South. A spacious dual aspect room with windows overlooking the rear garden. Door leading through to

Sitting Room 14'6 x 18'6 (4.41m x 5.63m)



South and West. A further spacious room comprising central open fireplace with tiled hearth and wooden surround. French doors leading out onto the patio and rear garden. A second door leads back to the main hallway. Stairs from the main hallway lead up to

First Floor

Landing

With door giving access to the airing cupboard housing the water tank, heating/hot water controls and partially slatted wooden shelves. Further doors lead off to

Bedroom One 13'11 x 11'5 (4.24m x 3.47m)

East and South. A good size dual aspect double bedroom with fitted hanging cupboard.

Bedroom Two 10'2 x 10'6 (3.09m x 3.20m)

North and East. A smaller double bedroom with fitted hanging cupboard and eaves storage space. Wall mounted wash hand basin.

Bedroom Three 11'5 x 8' (3.47m x 2.43m)

South. A good size single bedroom with fitted hanging cupboard.

Bedroom Four 11'6 x 7'9 (3.50m x 2.36m max)

South. A further single bedroom with fitted hanging cupboard.

Bathroom

Fitted with wall mounted wash hand basin and bath with mixer taps and shower attachment over. Separate shower cubicle with Mira shower. Fan heater and extractor fan.

Separate WC

Fitted with low flush WC, wall mounted wash hand basin.

Outside



The Rectory is situated directly opposite the Church in a secluded position. Accessed through the Church car park, a wooden gate leads to a generous driveway providing parking for a number of cars. Adjacent to the driveway there is a single garage with up and over door and pedestrian door. A high level gate provides access to the side courtyard with access to the utility room and garden shed.

The property is surrounded by garden on all sides; mainly laid to grass and interspersed with mature trees and shrubs. To the rear of the property there is a small paved seating area and second garden shed.

St Peter & St Paul Lavenham



Lavenham Parish Church is of major architectural significance and features in Simon Jenkins's celebrated *England's Thousand Best Churches*. As well as a place of worship and central to town life, it is a popular tourist destination and the generosity of our visitors contributes to our funds to maintain the church and keep it at the forefront of Lavenham's many historical amenities.

Fabric

The Quinquennial Programme is maintained by Nicholas Jacob Architects and although disrupted by the pandemic, there are no outstanding Category A works required and the list of other works is being steadily attended to. We are supported in our efforts to maintain and improve the fabric of the Church by an active *Friends of Lavenham Church* whose generosity has sustained the Churchwardens in their efforts over the years.

The Churchyard is closed to new burials and the grounds are maintained by the Parish Council to a high standard, for which we are truly indebted.

There has been an on-going programme of works to maintain and repair the fine organ, which was built for Holy Trinity Bournemouth in 1884 by Henry Willis, moved to St Swithin Bournemouth in 1972 and then to Lavenham in 1996, and extended in 2009.

The eight bells were cast between 1625 and 1846, and the full ring is heard regularly, on Sundays and for weddings and other special occasions as required.

Bookstall

The second-hand bookstall is an important part of the fundraising efforts of the parish, and a project is currently under way to re-site it from the back of the North Aisle to a location under the tower with custom-made shelving and storage space, and appropriate lighting, for which funding is already in place. Over the decade or so that it has been running, it has raised in the region of £144,000 for the support of the church, so the churchwardens and PCC consider the project work well worth the expense.

Fundraising

Lavenham is blessed in that not only do we have a beautiful historic church, but we have the means and fund-raising support to maintain and improve it for the use of the community and to the continued glory of God. We are grateful to parishioners past and present for ensuring that we can hand our treasure on to the future.

It is worth noting that when lead was stolen from a section of the roof in 2015, an appeal quickly raised sufficient funds to meet the cost of replacement and repairs not already covered by insurance. This

certainly spared the church fabric further damage and limited the consequences of the theft considerably.

Outreach

Outside the normal pattern of weekly services the church engages with the Diocese's 'Growing in God' initiative by hosting the following activities:

Think and Drink – a monthly meeting led by our curate intended for those in the church and wider community to think more deeply about our faith;

Men's Cookery Club – a monthly meeting led by our curate and intended to attract men to meet together in common purpose and to provide a platform for friendship and faith;

Knit and Natter – this lay-led group meets fortnightly and seeks to attract men and women to meet for friendship;

Children's Holiday Club – a lay-led activity offering children and their parent/carers the opportunity to enjoy craft and other activities in church, taking place on occasional mornings during the school holidays;

Informal fellowship around tea and coffee – this happens weekly in church after our Sunday morning and Wednesday service of Holy Communion. There are also occasional open coffee mornings held in the Village Hall which attract about 12 people;

On a Sunday in August the church has often held '**Open Air Church**' inviting the community to bring a

picnic to a local recreation area for church and friendship;

Also in August, we usually hold a **Church Tower Open Day**, when visitors are able to climb the tower and enjoy the panoramic views over Lavenham and the surrounding countryside.

Church Life

The church building is open to the public each day. The church contains a church shop, second-hand bookshop, kitchen, toilet facilities and has an area set aside for use by younger children which is stocked with toys, books and other activities. The Lady Chapel is set aside as an area for prayer, contemplation and remembrance of loved ones.

The church is fortunate to have a number of lay teams undertaking the work associated with church flowers, brass cleaning, bell ringing, running the church shop and second-hand bookshop. There are rotas for lesson readers and intercessors. The church has a robed choir with 9/10 members.

The church co-publishes *Lavenham Life*, a monthly 60-page magazine which is read widely across the community.

The building is available to the local community and hosts a variety of events including art exhibitions, regular concerts by The Lavenham Sinfonia, and other concerts with performers ranging from classical tenor Russell Watson to pop groups such as The Manfreds and Lindisfarne.



Visiting choir from our Patron, Gonville & Caius College Cambridge, rehearses for Choral Evensong

St Mary the Virgin Preston St Mary



The Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin in Preston St Mary was built during the 14th and 15th centuries, though there is evidence that there was a church here at least two hundred years before that.

The church is surrounded by a still extant graveyard. At the entrance to the churchyard is a war memorial engraved with the names of the fallen from the two World Wars of the 20th century. Beyond it, and standing before the tower, is an ancient yew tree, believed to be considerably older than the existing building.

The building is listed Grade I and is of the typical East Anglian form – a nave with clerestory, north and south aisles separated by stone columns, a West Tower, North Porch and a Chancel to the East. Off the Chancel to the north is the Vestry. The tower contains six bells, still rung regularly. The North Porch is an example of flush flintwork – among the finest in Suffolk.

Notable features inside the church include the heraldic shields in the windows and on the bosses above the stone columns. They include the Arms of leading institutions and families in the area and were placed there in the late 16th or early 17th century by Robert Ryece of Preston Hall, a benefactor of the church and village whose charity is still today helping young people in Preston. There are 52 shields left from over 150 which were there originally. In 2014, to mark the centenary of the Diocese, three more were added in the North Porch – those of the Diocese, our Patron Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and the Winston family, recent benefactors of the church and community.

The missing shields were lost when the tower collapsed in 1863, falling on the nave roof and demolishing much of the west end, including the organ, and burying the fine Norman font, which survives today, still with a crack sustained in the collapse.

Also on display and given by Robert Ryece are two painted wood triptychs, one displaying the very rare Arms of Queen Elizabeth I and the other the Ten Commandments. Both date from the late 16th century.

The church is open every day for visitors, and its architecture, history and contents are described in great detail in a booklet published by the PCC.

The Parish Council publishes *Preston Parish Paper*, a bi-monthly newsletter which is circulated to the whole village, and which contains a significant portion dedicated to the church.

The church has a dedicated and enthusiastic 'Friends of the Church' who arrange events to raise funds for the church fabric. There is a regular get together organised by the Friends which takes place in the Village Hall with coffee and cakes, plant sale and raffle.

A long-standing event is the annual Christkindlmarkt, organised by the Friends, where Christmas decorations and gifts, mulled wine and food are sold to raise funds. This is made possible by the generous participation of all members of the village, not necessarily regular church-goers.

Set in the heartland of Suffolk's agricultural community, the very pretty village of Preston St Mary lies 2.5 miles to the north-east of its benefice partner Lavenham. While it does not have the bustle and amenities of Lavenham it offers a quiet, rural haven to those wishing to escape the madding crowd.

Preston land stretches extensively to its neighbouring villages of Kettlebaston, Thorpe Morieux, Brent Eleigh and Lavenham but there is only one main road, The Street, in which sit the Church, Pub and Village Hall, all centres of friendly, community activity of various kinds.

For those who need a quiet open space to sit and contemplate the glories of nature, the traditional churchyard offers peace and tranquility, and the footpaths beyond the village give walkers the opportunity of immersing themselves in the beautiful Suffolk countryside.

There are a number of listed timber-framed and thatched houses which lend the village a feeling of bygone times and remoteness, and indeed an Anglo-Saxon settlement was detected here in recent times. An archaeological dig featured on Channel Four's Time Team a



few years ago at Priory Farm brought Preston to the nation's attention for Roman finds, while the very rare Elizabethan Arms and Commandments Boards which hang in the Church have been recognised as worthy examples to be borrowed by National Museums for their important exhibitions, the most recent being the British Library 2021-22. An international debut took place at the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris.

Preston has much to offer those who love the countryside, for whom the historical and architectural heritage of the Church Building can also be their spiritual haven.



The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich

The Diocese covers the county of Suffolk, excluding the area around Lowestoft in the north-east, and one parish in Essex. It is a mainly rural Diocese with a large number of small villages, plus market towns including Woodbridge, Halesworth, Sudbury and Beccles and the cathedral town of Bury St Edmunds with its historic ruins of the old Abbey. Ipswich is the county town with a population of about 137,000. Suffolk's population is about 650,000. The county embraces historic places of interest such as Sutton Hoo, culture at Snape Maltings with the famous annual Aldeburgh Music Festival – Snape and Aldeburgh are on the Heritage Coast, which is a haven for lovers of natural history and birdlife. The busy port of Felixstowe is at the end of the A14 which runs via Cambridge to the Midlands and the A12 which gives access to London and the Norfolk Broads.

The Church of England in Suffolk

We are often known as 'the Church of England in Suffolk'. The diocesan bishop is the Right Reverend Martin Seeley, and the suffragan bishop is the Right Reverend Dr Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich. Both work from the Bishop's House in Ipswich. They work together closely to help us shape our vision and strategy, and amongst a plethora of other tasks offer regular teaching mornings to nurture the faith of people in our congregations – and a regular vlog which can be found on Facebook. There are 3 archdeaconries and over 450 churches where visitors will find a wide range of worshipping styles, from the traditional to contemporary, as well as Fresh Expressions and growing numbers of 'Lightwave' groups for those who haven't connected with traditional church previously. The Cathedral of St Edmund and St James in Bury St Edmunds is the mother church of the Diocese and is proactive in offering support to clergy and parishes including welcoming parishes on pilgrimage. We also work closely with our 88 Church of England primary schools. All this is, of course, supported by a small and committed diocesan staff based in the diocesan office in Ipswich.

Growing in God

Our diocesan vision is to be 'Growing in God', aiming to grow 'flourishing congregations making a difference'. This vision was accepted by Diocesan Synod in 2014 and since then we have been focussing on four key priorities:

- Growing in Depth: responding to the call of Christ in every part of our lives
- Growing in Number: drawing the contacts we have into the life of God's kingdom

- Growing in Influence: reaching beyond ourselves in our impact on the wider world
- Growing Younger; building churches whose age-range reflects our communities



Parishes are encouraged to use a simple **Mission Action Planning** tool to help us all to focus on these priorities and how they might be worked out in each different context. We are trusting God that this vision, underpinned by a commitment to Christian stewardship, will bear fruit as we look to the future.

As part of this vision, we have recently received Strategic Development Funding for two major projects: Inspiring Ipswich, overseen by the Archdeacon of Ipswich which aims to grow the church in Ipswich through church planting and reaching out to those who live in the town, and 'Growing God in the Countryside', overseen by the Archdeacon for Rural Mission. This focusses on nurturing and discipling new Christians through small Lightwave groups and hubs such as the one being established at Bungay. (more information about the Growing in God in the Countryside project plan is available at www.cofesuffolk.org/about-us/our-vision/).

We have also been part of a pilot scheme exploring how we can use our church buildings more creatively both for those who worship regularly and for the benefit of our communities and many churches have benefitted from this.

We are broadening our vision through a growing partnership with the Diocese of Kagera in Tanzania, with fruitful visits and links being established.

Fulfilling the Vision

We value our huge range of different ministries: we have over 100 stipendiary clergy, plus many SSM and PTO clergy as well as lay and ordained chaplains who can be found in such diverse places as schools, prisons, hospitals, hospices, the army, RAF and the police. Some clergy are ordained to serve in their local benefice through our pioneering 'auxiliary ordination pathway' which enables people's vocations to ordained ministry to be discerned within the Diocese.

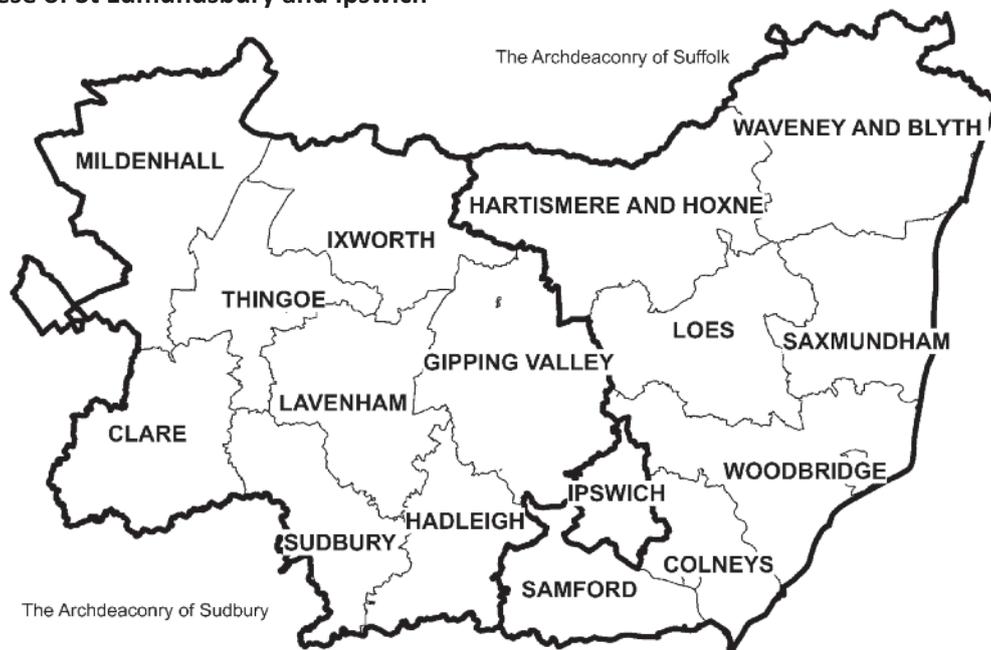
All clergy work alongside lay ministers – Readers, elders, and the growing number of people exercising recently introduced licensed ministries: pioneer ministers, evangelists, youth ministers and children's

and family workers. Our ministry deployment principles encourage teams or clusters of lay and ordained ministers to work together so that clergy feel less isolated and ministry resources the mission of the church more effectively. We are just beginning to develop the principle of 'local ministers' in our benefices, releasing people's gifts to serve in their locality.

We are excited about these new developments which are playing an important part in our diocesan vision of Growing in God.

So, in summary, as our Growing in God vision states, we aspire to be people who know that 'God is with us, gathering us as Christ-centred communities, calling us to make Christian disciples, sending us in loving service, empowering us by the Holy Spirit'.

The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich



The Deanery of Lavenham

The Benefice of Lavenham with Preston is on the south-western side of the Lavenham Deanery, which comprises seven benefices to the east and south-east of Bury St Edmunds, including Lavenham and 27 villages.

As well as Lavenham, these include the Elmswell and Woolpit Benefices on the A14 corridor in the north, with one and two parishes respectively, Rattlesden, Rougham and Monks Eleigh with four or five parishes each, and Bradfield/Cockfield, whose five parishes have recently been joined by a further four from the previous St Edmund Way Benefice.

The Lavenham Deanery Plan envisions our churches 'living as Christ at the heart of our communities' by:

- enabling the ministry and mission of the whole people of God;
- respecting and celebrating diversity within the churches of the deanery;
- offering support to enable and encourage those who minister.

In 2016 the Deanery Plan was revised taking into account the Diocesan wide initiative entitled 'Growing In God' with its four key strands: Growing in Depth; Growing in Number; Growing in Influence; Growing Younger. Clergy across the Lavenham Deanery work together with laity on initiatives under these four headings either for the benefit of the whole deanery or a cluster of parishes within the deanery.

The Deanery has usually met its financial obligations in full to the Diocese in recent years through the Parish Share. Some benefices have been generous in giving over and above their allocated target in order to help the parishes that have been unable to pay the full amount asked of them.

The Lavenham Deanery functions well, with all stipendiary clergy required to attend its Chapter meetings and Deanery Synod meetings (three per annum). From time to time Greater Chapter meetings are held involving retired clergy and Readers. There is an annual Chapter Quiet Day and Summer Social, and a post-Christmas meal for Greater Chapter members and spouses.

