



## The Context

The Woodbridge Group is a benefice of 6 rural parishes, Brinkworth, Dauntsey, Garsdon, Great Somerford, Lea and Little Somerford

- **Social context**

The population is approx. 4500, and is geographically about 7 miles East-West and 6 miles North-South.

- **Brinkworth** is a long thin strip of a village (arguably England's longest) stretched out over 4.5 miles along one road, with a concentration of housing at a discernible centre around the church, pub and a Church of England school. Physically and population wise this is the largest village (about 1500) but with the smallest proportion of church attendees per head of population, partly due to the extreme dispersion of dwellings. There are a lot of farms, a few large houses, mostly small private houses, one small social housing estate. In terms of public transport, there is a reasonable bus service to Malmesbury / Swindon / Royal Wootton Bassett with access to the National Express network. People in this village relate mostly to Royal Wootton Bassett as the nearest town, but also to Malmesbury or even Chippenham. There is a real mix of farming / semi-skilled workers / commuting or home-working professionals / retired / semi-retired. The Church of England Primary School - Brinkworth Earl Danbys – is almost next door to the church, with about 150 pupils split (by age) between here and another site at Dauntsey.
- **Dauntsey** – is a grouping of 5 hamlets, each different in character, and sufficiently spread apart that the M4 passes through the middle without you really noticing the village as you pass through. The church is isolated in a well-to-do area associated with the old Manor House, away from the two largest hamlets. The lower age range of the school is in 'Dauntsey Green', which along with 'St James' and 'Dauntsey Lock' are the most populous hamlets, including a small social housing estate and many 20<sup>th</sup> century small private houses. A lot of farms, large country houses and horse owners are found here.
- **Garsdon** – population 80 – is a small hamlet to the east of Malmesbury comprising mostly farms / ex-farms / professionals. There is no public transport. Threatened with closure about 20 years ago, this church is now thriving and slowly growing its dedicated congregation of around 20 people each week.
- **Great Somerford** – population around 1000 – has recently been expanded by 3 new small housing developments adding about 60 houses. This is the only village in the group with a shop. The Volunteer pub is popular and sells typical pub food. Somerfords Walter Powell Church of England Primary School is part of the Diocese of Bristol Academies Trust and federated with two other local schools (in another benefice). Numbers

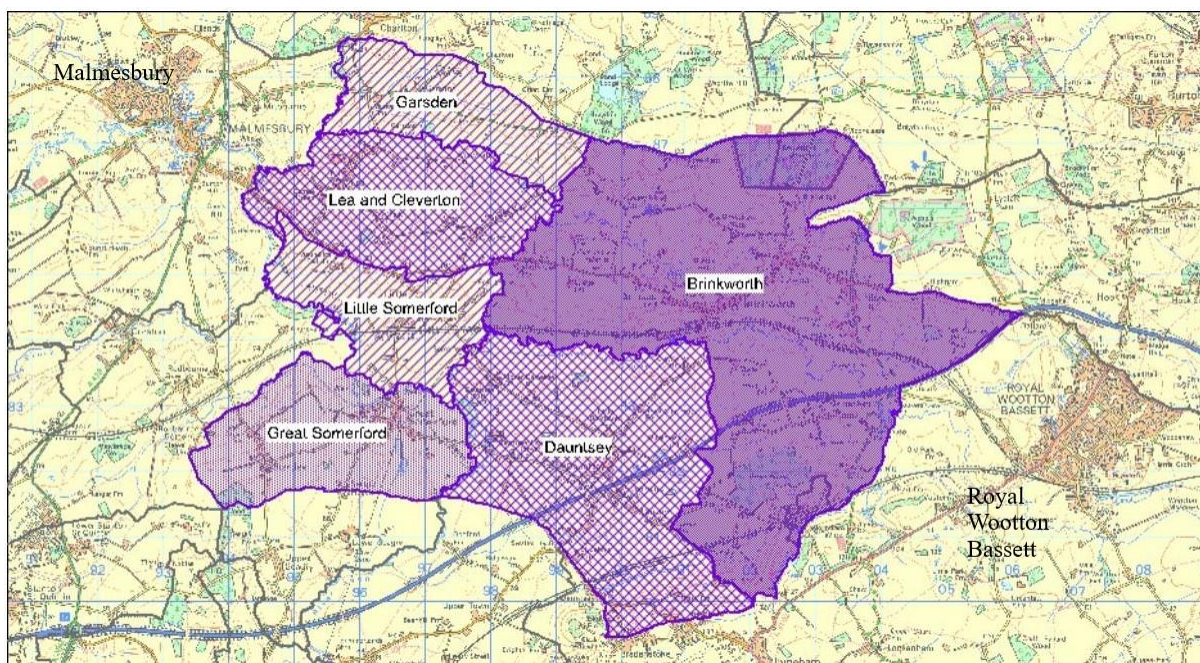
of pupils varies from 45-55 – many are sent to private school at the beginning of Key Stage 2. Recent new leadership and a complete change of staff within the last 2 years has been beneficial for the pupils. Within the village there are many large houses at the end of gated drives, with private horse paddocks, swimming pools and tennis courts (look on Google Maps!). A couple of small social housing developments from the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century means that there is a real social demographic mix here. There are bus services to Chippenham and indirectly to Malmesbury and Swindon.

- **Little Somerford** – population about 400-500 – is one mile further north and across the River Avon from Great Somerford with a lot of modern housing mixed in with older larger properties. There are bus services to Chippenham, Malmesbury and Swindon. Hill House is a nursing home with which we have a good relationship, and where we go in to do monthly Songs of Praise and Communion services. The Somerford Arms is a popular pub, with a gastro-pub menu and prices to match – good for a special occasion!
  - **Lea** – like Brinkworth this is a village which hugs the road without going too far either side. The Church of England Primary School (Lea and Garsdon School), recently expanded to allow one class per year group and to serve the wider Malmesbury area. It is about 1 mile from the church at the opposite end of the village, but this doesn't prevent us having good working relations! A high proportion of professionals in relatively modern large houses at the end of long drives live here and there are still some surviving cottages as evidence of what Lea once looked like. A small social housing development sits opposite the school.
- The nearest hospital is Great Western Hospital at Swindon, about 30 minutes drive away. The nearest doctors surgeries are in Malmesbury, Sutton Benger or Royal Wootton Bassett
  - Shopping: Malmesbury has Aldi / 2 x Co-Op / Waitrose, a petrol station, a thriving High Street and a garden centre. A major employer is Dyson. Chippenham (15 mins south) has a wider range of shops, Morrisons, Sainsbury, Tesco, Aldi, Lidl. Royal Wootton Bassett has Aldi, Sainsbury, Co-Op, a good High Street, several petrol stations. Bath, Bristol and Swindon have better retail and entertainment.
  - Employment opportunities for working spouses – Swindon is 25-30 minutes away, and the eastern side of Bristol is a similar distance, both with a variety of industry and high-tech firms, healthcare, hospitals, plenty of teaching opportunities locally in state and private sectors.
  - A Free Methodist congregation has recently started up in Brinkworth, and there is a long established but dwindling Methodist Chapel in Great Somerford. We have good relations with both and occasionally worship together.

## The Church Context

Geographically Woodbridge stretches from the eastern border of Malmesbury to the far side of Brinkworth, a couple of miles west of Royal Wootton Bassett. It straddles the Malmesbury to Swindon B-road, and the M4; the London-Penzance and London-Swansea rail lines pass through from east to west. It is about halfway between Swindon and Bristol, just north of Chippenham, between M4 junctions 16 and 17. Cirencester is about 20 minutes' drive north.

Woodbridge came together recently as a benefice in a major re-organisation. In the mid 2000's it was realised that most of the incumbents would retire imminently and the opportunity was taken to shake everything up. From 2009 onwards as people started to retire the new groupings started to come together, and were formally constituted in 2016. Woodbridge contains 3 pairs of churches which were previously in other benefices or were entire benefices, but over time the local behaviour has switched to being part of the new larger benefice.



Across Woodbridge we have local services in weeks 1 to 3 of the month, and a joint Group Communion service (Common Worship, regardless of the normal preference of the host church) in week 4. We only have one service of Holy Communion in the benefice each Sunday – rotating around the six churches in turn.

This benefice has the best sense of group identity that I have experienced, with a good degree of co-operation and sharing of experience across churches. A well-functioning Group Council co-ordinates appropriate governance at the top level, and we will soon be exploring further development of this – the load of 6 PCCs is high on

the clergy!

### The Churches

- **St Michael and All Angels Brinkworth.** Central/slightly evangelical tradition using Common Worship and 'Songs of Fellowship' song book. Sunday services are a mix of Messy Church (up to 50-60 people of all ages), People's Service – a long established lay-led service (10-20 people), and Morning Praise / Holy Communion (10-20 people).
- The Electoral Roll is approx. 30 and a typical Sunday attendance is 10-20.
- A kitchen and toilet make this a good venue for a variety of activities
  
- **St James the Great Dauntsey.** Central tradition using the Book of Common Prayer with two services a month – Morning Prayer or Holy Communion. The 'Complete Anglican Hymns Old and New' hymnbook is used.
- The Electoral Roll is 26 with a typical Sunday attendance of about 10.
- This is the last church without a toilet, but this is now being attended to, alongside a window repair project and potentially an organ rebuild within the next couple of years – these in themselves offer good training exercises.
  
- **All Saints Garsdon.** Central tradition using the Book of Common Prayer for Morning Prayer or Holy Communion. 'Anglican Hymns Old and New' hymnbook is used.
- The Electoral Roll is 22 with a typical Sunday attendance of 20. This is 25% of the village population – although many are coming from outside the village, and numbers and commitment are steadily rising year by year.
- This is a really close-knit church community. A recent re-ordering has added a toilet and small hospitality area with an open flexible space. This church has ambitious plans to be the beating heart of this tiny community.
  
- **St Peter and St Paul's Great Somerford.** Central tradition using the Book of Common Prayer or Common Worship. Morning Prayer, Holy Communion and Evening Prayer services are held – each alternating between the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship and using the 'Common Praise' hymnbook.
- The Electoral Roll is 37, and a typical Sunday attendance pre-pandemic was 20, but is currently around 15.
- In recent years over £280,000 has been raised by this church for re-roofing (2017) and internal re-ordering (2018-2020) which introduced a toilet, a servery area, removed a large number of pews and extensively refurbished most systems in the building and redecorated throughout – a much more flexible and usable space outside of worship.

- **St John the Baptist Little Somerford.** Central tradition using the Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship. Morning Prayer, Holy Communion and Evening Prayer services are held, each alternating between Book of Common Prayer and Common Worship. Two services are held per month.
- The Electoral Roll is about 16 and a typical Sunday attendance is about 10.
- This church is willing to try anything, even if it doesn't work. It plods on through financial challenges and has good standing within the community.
- **St Giles, Lea.** Evangelical / gathered church community using a projector and screen. The church is lighter on liturgy, using a good selection of modern worship music. As such it is distinctive within Woodbridge, and this has resulted in some church members moving to other churches within Woodbridge which are closer to the more traditional style of worship they prefer.
- The Electoral Roll is about 30, with a typical Sunday attendance of 20-25. There is some limited children's work here. Despite intense efforts with the school and within the village we struggle to translate anything across into a Sunday commitment.

#### Across the Benefice

- There are no regular weekday services within the group. A number of pre-existing coffee mornings have returned during 2021/2022 while others have not returned and some new initiatives are emerging especially where facilities have recently been enhanced.
- Occasional Offices over the last three years – pre-pandemic we had 10-15 weddings per year across the benefice, mostly in Brinkworth, Dauntsey and Great Somerford, between 10 and 20 funerals per year, and 10-15 baptisms per year. There are plenty of opportunities for training, and we often support other benefices in occasional offices. We do a joint wedding preparation session annually with several benefices to pool our resources and reduce the number of individual evening appointments with clergy.
- Daily offices and prayer in the parish – we do in-person Morning Prayer in church on Monday/Wednesday/Friday, and online, as part of the Mission Area, there is Morning Prayer Monday to Saturday to which clergy and laity contribute 2 or 3 days per week.
- House groups and other small group activities – there are a number of small groups, some led by ministry team members and some led by parishioners. This is an area for growth.

## Staff / Ministry Team

- Rector: Rev Steve Wilkinson, full time, ordained 2010, in post since 2014.
- Associate Minister: Rev Mike Graham, self-supporting (retired school teacher) ordained in 2017.
- 4 Licensed Lay Ministers: Jane Briggs, Tony Yates, Heather Lee and Debs Evans, who contribute between 1 and 3 Sundays per month.
- Administration: 1 Group Administrator and an Administrative Assistant, both part-time and shared with another benefice. We rent an office in Brinkworth.
- Lay involvement and collaborative ministry: There is a heavy dependence on our volunteer officers and PCC members, and during late 2021 / early 2022 we revised the service pattern, removing one service per month per church led by the Ministry Team and replacing it where possible with one led by suitably trained laity.
- North Wiltshire Mission Area (NWMA): This has been funded by strategic national funding since 2019 and NWMA has been running since 2017 when the 6 benefices of the North Wiltshire Deanery came together for CPAS 'THRIVE' training over a two year period. This was designed to give rural churches the chance to explore the possibilities for themselves and was fundamental in bringing 31 parishes closer together.
  - 2020's lockdowns built on this as we had a good basis for working together on joint online services. These have now stopped, but a daily online 'Morning Prayer' still continues for a small but faithful congregation who would not attend an in-person meeting.
  - In 2021 we were able to jointly raise £74k for a three year programme of youth interns led by a Youth Enabler. It has taken into mid 2022 for this to come to fruition but the prospects for the NWMA Youth programme are bright, as we develop / rebuild links into primary schools, secondary schools and existing church provision for younger members. The Deanery Synod was recently very excited about a presentation from the Youth Enabler and rightly so. Initial work with the schools in the summer term of 2022 was well received and we are very encouraged by this.
  - There is also an extensive programme of discipleship courses which we are sharing more and more to lighten the load on each benefice.
  - We focus on those things which we can do better together by sharing resources, leaving that which is better delivered locally or which is very much a local interest to the individual parishes.
- Wild Church: This was led by our 2020-2022 curate, Revd Matt Stone and is a monthly outdoor gathering, meeting at different places across the Mission Area, exploring our connection between God and nature. This has just been handed over to the NWMA Youth team as Matt moves on. After a couple of false starts

due to lockdowns, this Fresh Expression attracts between 30 and 50 people each time, and is still within its first full year.

- Activities for children and young people: Brinkworth's Messy Church, held monthly, is very successful. Lea has limited children's work. We are now addressing this across the Mission Area as part of the overall children / youth programme.
- There are no resolutions passed in relation to the Ordination of Women. We had a female Associate Minister (home grown!) from 2015-2018 who then moved out of the area to be closer to grandchildren, and our churches are very used to receiving ministry from both male and female clergy. I set a culture of tolerance and acceptance of all.



## **The Training Incumbent – Rev Steve Wilkinson**

- Prior to ordination I worked in the Electronics industry, ultimately as a Project Manager on global projects developing silicon chips for Philips. In my spare time I was a volunteer youth leader in a large evangelical church in Ferndown, Dorset.
- I was ordained in Bristol in 2010 and was a curate in a four parish rural benefice around Corsham in Wiltshire, the other side of Chippenham from Woodbridge. I came to Woodbridge as its first incumbent in 2014.
- I trained Rev Mike Graham from 2017-2020, who was a self-supporting curate (Ordained Local Minister) in our benefice, having previously been one of our Licensed Lay Ministers. He is now our Associate Minister.
- I completed the training of Rev Matt Stone who moved to us mid-curacy in summer 2020. His curacy effectively finished in spring 2022 and he is now holding an interim role elsewhere in the Diocese.
- I am Area Dean for North Wiltshire, and a member of Diocesan Synod which both give a broader view of the work of the Diocese and how we fit into it.
- I am part of the Diocese's Deliverance Ministry Team.
- As part of the North Wilts Mission Area we are slowly understanding what mission looks like in an area where many see faith as a private commodity not to be discussed with others. It's about growing confidence, and slowly pushing the boundaries of the church out to bring new people in. Weekly ministry meets the needs of those who are already within our circle, but the pressures of multi-parish ministry often make it difficult to encounter new people. Wild Church is one example of an initiative to bring others in, which grew out of a curate's enthusiasm and the extra capacity which they brought to the team.
- Current priorities: Our churches want to be able to meet regularly after two years of disruption. Where new initiatives spring up from a PCC I will engage with it and support them, and I'm also aware of the pressures on the PCCs. We encouraged people to take part in Living in Love and Faith in early 2022, we are looking the Common Cup in Communion services, and I am aware of the need to rebalance the roles of the Group Council and the 6 PCCs, to improve the loading on both clergy and volunteers.
- I take my own professional development seriously, and although opportunity for this has been limited in the last couple of years I did some online training on the impact of lockdowns on rural ministry and improving online service skills. Prior to this I joined the Deliverance Ministry Team in 2018, taking the national course for this, and attended a day conference by the Oasis Trust on matters of sexuality in mid-2019, ahead of the formal Church of England training of Living in Love and Faith. In April 2022 I attended a workshop on 'Contested Heritage' with a view to understanding how historic monuments in our churches with links to the slave trade etc., might best be dealt with.
- Patterns of sabbath and prayer: I ensure that I take a weekly day off, and at

*least* once a month a double day off. I'm not good at organising my own retreats, but I do make sure that I make time for family and leisure. Our pattern of weekday Morning Prayer within the benefice and Mission Area is designed (from my point of view) to make sure that I have a regular disciplined prayer time each working day of the week, and it provides us with an opportunity for other clergy, lay ministers and laity to pray together.

- Rev Matt Stone was my most recent curate and he is willing to speak informally to those considering coming here.
  - 07516 135557 / e-mail matt.stone @woodbridgegroup.co.uk

More information can be found on the following websites:

[www.woodbridgegroup.co.uk](http://www.woodbridgegroup.co.uk)

<https://nwma.org.uk/>

[www.wildchurch.net](http://www.wildchurch.net)

and our social media presences:

**Facebook** – ‘Woodbridge Group of Churches’ / ‘Woodbridge Churches Online’ / ‘Malmesbury Abbey and NWMA Online’

**Youtube** – ‘Woodbridge Churches Online’ channel – not much used now but gives you a flavour of us from our lockdown services.

**Twitter** - @woodbridgevicar

## The Curacy

- We can offer either a stipendiary or self-supporting curacy – I have had experience of both full-time stipendiary and part-time self-supporting curates.
- The Woodbridge Group and the North Wilts Mission Area are at an exciting point in their journey, as we firmly establish Wild Church and our Children and Youth programme. There would be plenty of opportunity for a curate to engage with these or to bring enthusiasm for other initiatives. They would need to be prepared to work across an extended geographical area outside of our benefice. Our service patterns realistically reflect our permanent staffing situation rather than the temporary bonus brought by a curate, so we consider that a curate brings us some extra capacity to both train themselves and to indulge some of their own passions in ministry.
- I would like to develop the personal discipleship of parishioners generally, so this would be a specific opportunity for a new curate and the Mission Area has a defined set of resources (Alpha, Bible Course, Prayer Course) that a curate would be well positioned to help us deploy.
- I would aim to work out the precise needs of a curate and would give them a fair share of the occasional offices as they arose, allowing the opportunity to observe me and reflect on how I do things before reversing the roles and letting them have their turn.
- They would be allowed to do things in their style, and to express their God-given personality. The Mission Area is enthusiastic about embracing things that we haven't yet thought of but which somebody is passionate about.
- They could expect my full support and backing (curates don't always get it right first time, but I take the blame for that).
- They would be deployed across the benefice on Sundays, typically no more than 2 services per Sunday, and in time we could build on their own skills and interests.
- I would ask them to take part in different PCCs, to build their own portfolio of practical skills towards their next role in ministry, be that incumbency or otherwise.
- We would meet on a weekly basis for staff meeting with other clergy, and as appropriate for supervision / professional development.
- As a rural setting with poor public transport we consider driving to be a necessary skill and access to a car to be essential. A previous curate in another benefice did not drive and made an excellent job of getting himself around on a bike, but we did feel this really limited the things he was available for. None of our 2021 Youth Interns drove and this caused extreme difficulties with transportation. We struggle with straddling the balance of environmental responsibility and the busyness of rural clergy life.

- Woodbridge is committed to supporting a curate financially. Full expenses will be paid, and parishioners have been extremely hospitable and supportive of our most recent curate.
- Housing would be in a modern Diocesan property in the north of Chippenham, 11 Aintree Drive, which is a 20 minute drive away from the nearest part of Woodbridge. It has 4 bedrooms, 1 bathroom, double garage, kitchen/utility, study/dining room. Chippenham has many primary and 2 secondary schools.

