

Clun Valley Benefice Profile

The parishes of Hopesay,
Newcastle on Clun,
Clun, Clunbury with Clunton
and Bettws-y-Crwyn

Our shared vision is for our churches
to be a visible presence at the heart of
our communities, serving and
encouraging the love of God.



St Mary's, Hopesay



St George's, Clun



St Mary's, Clunton



St John the Evangelist, Newcastle



St Swithin's, Clunbury



St Mary's, Bettws-y-Crwyn



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Welcome

We are ready to welcome a new vicar

The Clun Valley Benefice has five parishes, with six open churches. We eagerly await a new vicar to work with us and lead us to do God's work in this beautiful area of South Shropshire.

Ministry in the benefice is carried out by the vicar, supported by a reader, a benefice administrator and gifted and willing church members. We are rural communities, a mix of farming families and others who have chosen to come to the valley to work or to retire. There will be opportunities for work with three local primary schools and within our churches there is an openness to try different forms of worship alongside our much loved traditional services.

The community very much considers the church to have an important role, as evidenced by the number of Occasional services, especially funerals, conducted in each church. More importantly, there is a sense of 'ownership' in the local community, many local families going back several generations.

The Benefice now needs a new vicar to work with us to shape our future and to engage with our community and encourage further active involvement with our churches.

Our Mission

Our congregations are small and aged. We have enthusiasm and ideas but we need someone to join with us to focus on the way ahead and assist us in bringing younger families to join us, making our churches more relevant to them, whilst continuing to value the church members we currently have.

Our current strengths

(as discussed at our vacancy meeting)

The strengths of our community are :

- Tranquillity and beautiful countryside
- Good community spirit
- Good schools
- A wide range of social activities
- Good pubs
- A safe place to raise children
- A good GP practice
- Beautiful historic buildings

In our six churches there is

- A warm ambience
- A desire to work as a team across all six churches
- Active involvement by many church members in the wider community
- Dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers
- A history of using our church buildings for community events such as concerts and exhibitions
- A strong meaningful relationship with the Methodist Church in Clun
- Weekly worship enhanced by our five regular organists who are happy to travel to play in other churches in the benefice
- A mid-week benefice service in Clun, sadly reduced to monthly during the vacancy
- Open the Book in Clunbury, Clun and Newcastle Schools
- Bible study and prayer group in Clun and Hopesay
- A willingness to explore a range of worship styles
- Refreshments and hospitality in most churches.

Our Challenges

In our community our challenges are:

- Lack of local jobs and social activities especially for the young.
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of public transport
- No nearby hospitals
- Poor roads, especially in bad weather

In our churches

- Congregations are small and apart from at major festivals, on the whole, worshippers are over 60 years of age.
- Some buildings are large with inadequate heating
- Not all have kitchen and toilet
- Our services are traditional so may be seen as old fashioned
- There are few activities which involve children and young families
- A desire to grow our congregations numerically and spiritually, welcoming all ages and backgrounds

We would like a vicar who will

- be prayerful and have a developed and maintained spiritual life
- be positive about rural ministry, recognising that our village churches are churches for the whole community
- will have, if possible, an understanding of rural affairs and farming life
- be an inspirational preacher and teacher
- bring enthusiasm for and skill in bringing families into the heart of our churches
- promote a pastoral ministry to all ages within our churches and communities
- lead the church community in setting and holding its vision for mission and growth
- identify, encourage and develop gifts for ministry among the laity in the parishes
- encourage and build on the existing partnerships with the three primary schools, Methodist Church in Clun and groups from the wider community and external organisations
- work in collaboration with the PCCs and churchwardens to ensure effective organisation through good communication
- nurture our churches, leading different styles of prayer and worship and build on our traditions
- have a commitment to numerical and spiritual growth
- will be a spiritual guide to the congregation, helping them grow in their own faith
- handle conflict constructively
- help us to listen to what God is saying and discern where He is leading our churches
- demonstrate leadership qualities, delegate efficiently and be flexible
- have good IT skills but can recognise the importance of personal contact with parishioners
- have a good sense of humour and is approachable
- take time to give attention to their own needs, allowing the personal, family and spiritual aspects of their own life to flourish alongside the demands of ministry
- be a confident driver and navigator on poor narrow roads in all weathers.

Support and encouragement

... and we will

- pray for you and offer help and support to fulfil your calling
- welcome you into the benefice family and love, support and care for you
- be flexible and willing to respond positively to change
- work alongside you to further God's work in this valley and beyond
- always be there with a cuppa and friendly face



Leadership and Support

The Diocese of Hereford is a place of contrasts. We're geographically large, but our population is small. We straddle six local authorities (Herefordshire, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Monmouthshire, Telford & Wrekin, and Powys) and two countries (England and Wales), but we are one Diocese with one Bishop. We are predominantly rural, with scattered communities, but we have a vibrant cathedral city, several historic market towns and post-industrial towns, and serve estate communities as well.

We are all committed, whatever our context, to our calling to make Christ known, to love God, one another and our neighbours, and to work for the common good. We do this not only through our churches but also through our church schools and academies which are an integral part of our Diocese. Our diocesan values are that we are prayerful, Christ-like, and engaged, and we seek to live out those values in our varying settings in a way that is rooted in the local.

We work collaboratively wherever possible, knowing that ministry brings unique demands as well as unique privileges. We are small enough (in terms of numbers) that clergy can get to know one another and the diocesan staff quite easily.

Recognising that, while ordained ministry is a joy and a privilege it can bring challenges too, we've recently launched an "Accompanying" programme where all incumbents in a new post, whether this is their first incumbency or not, are linked with a member of our Mission & Ministry team who will not only act as a mentor for the new incumbent, but work with them and their PCC to help discern how God is leading them to work out the plans and hopes you'll read in this Profile. This goes hand in hand with our "Servants and Stewards" learning community, which meets once a month for a year, run by external facilitators with input from the Bishop and Archdeacons. There's a new cohort each academic year, and we've found that clergy have not only benefitted from the teaching itself but also from being able to meet and share with peers as they learn together.

Turning to the Clun Valley Benefice themselves, it needs to be acknowledged that they have had a high turnover of vicars in the recent past. Their most recent vicar had to move unexpectedly after only a year, for unforeseen family reasons, and the previous vicar resigned due to ill health. The parishes are keen to welcome a new Vicar who, God willing, will be with them for some time and give the strong leadership and stability they are seeking as they look to the future and discern what it will mean to live out their vocation in this part of the Diocese of Hereford in the coming years.

If you would like to know more about life as a member of the clergy in the Diocese of Hereford please contact the Archdeacon of Ludlow on 01588 673571 or Fiona.Gibson@hereford.anglican.org



Hereford Cathedral



Bishop Richard



Archdeacon Fiona

*'Clunton and Clunbury,
Clungunford and Clun,
are the quietest places
under the sun.'*

So said A. E. Housman in his poem 'A Shropshire Lad'. That may have been true in 1895, although this area was a thriving farming area then but it is certainly not true in 2023.

Despite the reduction in the population, transport, shops and pubs, there is still a great deal going on and it is said that you could be out every evening of the week at one club or another, somewhere in the valley.



The Clun Valley is in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and lies between Craven Arms with its main road, railway and bus links, and the Welsh border. The scenery is stunning and the air clean, with fabulous walking routes. The Clun Valley Benefice covers an area approximately 17 miles long; from Bettws-y-Crwyn near the Welsh border to Hopesay, the parish church for Aston on Clun. The only town in the benefice is Clun with its historic bridge and ruins of a Norman castle overlooking the town. We are 5 parishes with 6 churches. Clunton is part of Clunbury parish. The total population is 2,622. Over 99% is of white ethnicity. 68% stated their religion as Christian in the 2011 census.

Roads in the valley are mostly minor ones. Many are very narrow, with passing places, and some areas and churches are difficult to access and especially so in bad weather.

We have three Church of England primary schools in Clun, Clunbury and Newcastle on Clun. See pages 21-23 Older children attend secondary school at Bishop's Castle (5 miles from Clun) or Ludlow (17 miles). School buses provide transport.

The lack of public transport is of great concern in this area. The Clun Valley has only two scheduled buses a week, on Monday and Friday mornings. These serve the Clun Valley and go to Craven Arms and Ludlow, returning a few hours later. There are also community dial-a-ride services with a wheelchair accessible minibus. However running times are limited. Clun Valley Good Neighbours Scheme and Clun Valley Community Cars, both run by volunteers, provide transport to urgent health appointments for those without their own transport. Clun Valley Good Neighbours Scheme

also provides a befriending service for the more isolated members of our community.

Broome in the parish of Hopesay has a small station on the picturesque Heart of Wales line. There is also a mainline station at Craven Arms, 9 miles from Clun, for services to Shrewsbury, Crewe and Manchester to the North, with Hereford and Cardiff to the South.

In Clun there is a medical practice servicing the valley, a post office and two small supermarkets. There is also a community shop in Aston on Clun and pubs in Aston on Clun, Purslow, Clunton and Clun. A mobile library and mobile post office visit the valley and there are further facilities and shops in Craven Arms.

Church Life in the Benefice

As committed members of our benefice we look forward to welcoming a new vicar and working with him/her to spread God's word and carry out God's work in our communities.

Over the last few years we have been following a pattern of worship which, on the whole, seems to satisfy our current needs. Collating timetables for six churches has not been an easy task and the incumbent has been helped in this by a Benefice Administrator.

We recognise that our incumbent cannot possibly be in every church each Sunday. Our pattern of regular services is designed so that the vicar takes services of Holy Communion, Morning Prayer and Evensong on Sundays and a weekly mid-week service at Trinity Hospital, Almhouses in Clun. However, during the current vacancy this pattern has been restricted to Holy Communion on alternate Sundays in the Eastern part of the valley (Clunbury/Clunton and Hopesay) or the Western part (Clun, Newcastle/Bettws) and a monthly service mid-week at Trinity.

Hopesay has the benefit of a Reader who leads a service once a month and some

churchwardens are willing to lead services. In Clun, two services a month are jointly held with the Methodist church. Each church has the benefit of an organist, all of whom are happy to play at other churches if necessary. All services are considered to be Benefice Services and this has encouraged more shared worship and fellowship along the valley.

| A typical monthly rota during the vacancy | |
|---|--|
| First Sunday | 9.45am Holy Communion at Clun 10am Morning Prayer at Clunbury. A new arrangement with a visiting reader 11.15am Holy Communion at Bettws 11.15am Morning Worship at Hopesay |
| First Tuesday | 10 am Holy Communion at Trinity |
| Second Sunday | 9.45am Joint lay-led worship with Clun Methodist Church either at St George's or Clun Methodist Church 10am, Holy Communion at Clunbury 11.15am Holy Communion at Hopesay |
| Third Sunday | 9.45am Holy Communion at Clun 11.15am Holy Communion at Newcastle 11.15am Morning Worship at Hopesay |
| Fourth Sunday | 9.45am. Joint lay-led worship with Clun Methodist Church either at St George's or Clun Methodist Church 10am, Holy Communion at Clunton 11.15am Holy Communion at Hopesay |
| Fifth Sunday | 10am Benefice United Service of Holy Communion, revolving round the 6 churches. |

Other worship

As well as regular Sunday Services and a service at Trinity Hospital, other services are held in the benefice throughout the year.

- In March the annual World Day of Prayer is supported with each parish organising it in turn
- St George's Day in Clun often involves St George's School and a gathering of community groups. The opportunity to meet regularly twice a month with Clun Methodist Church is an important part of St George's worship.
- This is a farming community and an important service at Bettws is their lambing service.
- St Swithin's in Clunbury enjoys a patronal festival in July.
- Each church has a harvest festival and a carol service.

- A Benefice Memorial service is held in Clun on All Souls Day.
- In November, Remembrance services are held in Hopesay, Clun involving the local branch of the Royal British Legion and at the Purslow War Memorial. Newcastle school has also held Remembrance services in the churchyard.
- There has been a rota for our Christmas Eve midnight service with each church having a Christmas service either earlier on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day
- On Christmas Eve the Crib service is very popular.
- Easter Day services are on a rota with some churches leading their own worship.
- All three schools hold harvest, carols, Easter and leavers' services in church.



All these extra services are usually very well supported by the local communities.

In addition, a newly formed prayer group is meeting in Clun and Bible Study groups in Hopesay and Clun. Although no children regularly attend our services, we do have children at festivals, school services and other occasions. Our vicar has always been welcomed into our primary schools.

| Parish | Population | Regular attendees |
|--|------------|-------------------------------|
| Clun | 1022 | 15-18 |
| Newcastle | 288 | A joint congregation of 10-12 |
| Bettws | 210 | |
| Clunbury with Clunton | 545 | 10-12 |
| Hopesay | 557 | 19-24 |
| Trinity | | 11-14 |
| The population figures are from the Church of England Research and Statistics Unit who have mapped the 2011 census to ecclesiastical boundaries and updated the figures to 2018. | | |

The Clun Valley is an area to which people retire. 26% of our population are over the age of 65. As a consequence there are a high number of funeral services each year. In 2022 there were 29 funerals, 4 marriages and 3 baptisms in the Valley.

Safeguarding in the Benefice

The benefice follows Diocesan safeguarding guidelines for all relevant activities and has a safeguarding officer who is responsible for ensuring that all the necessary checks and training are carried out in all churches. He/she is the person who should be contacted should anyone in the parishes have safeguarding concerns. The safeguarding officer attends all APCMs and most PCC meetings to report on safeguarding and discuss and update the PCC on current issues and also has regular meetings with the incumbent. Each year, every church reviews the benefice Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and all PCCs are asked to adopt this at their APCM. We have recently advertised this post in line with Church of England regulations.

Responsibilities and Committees

In addition to the usual church duties and responsibilities, the vicar of the Clun Benefice has a small number of other commitments.

Newcastle

Newcastle School

The Vicar is an ex-officio trustee of Newcastle School

Clun

Trustee of Clun School Charity

The Primary School was opened in 1863 and was reconstituted under a trust deed of 1897. Over the years the governance has changed and it is now a Church of England Academy. The vicar and churchwardens are still ex officio trustees with some residual powers, as is usually the case when the school was originally a church foundation.

Warden of Trinity Hospital

The vicar is ex officio trustee and Warden of Trinity Hospital. (See page 14)

Clunbury

Clunbury School

The vicar is a governor of Clunbury School

Finance

The benefice recognises the importance of contributing to the costs of ministry and mission here and across the Diocese, and aims to pay its way. However, like most churches we were affected by Covid when all our churches were closed. Two years on, we are beginning to get back to pre-Covid levels.

For 2023 our parish offers are

| | |
|----------------------------|---------------|
| Bettws-y-Crwyn | £2400 |
| Newcastle | £7000 |
| Clun | £17000 |
| Clunton | £3000 |
| Clunbury | £9700 |
| Hopesay | £10500 |
| Total offer in 2023 | £49600 |

The Vicarage

The Vicarage is a four bedroom, detached, family sized house with garage, built in 1989. Wonderful views across the rooftops of Clun to the beautiful countryside can be seen, especially from upstairs.

The accommodation includes lounge, dining room, study, kitchen, cloakroom, utility room, 4 bedrooms, store room and family bathroom. The house has oil-fired central heating, double glazing, cavity wall and loft space insulation.

There is a tarmac entrance drive with pedestrian gate, cattle grid and parking area which can accommodate several vehicles. The gardens have been well maintained, predominantly laid out to lawns.

The Vicarage is in Vicarage Road, Clun, just two minutes walk from St George's church, and seven minutes walk to the centre of Clun.



St Mary's, Bettws-y-Crwyn

St Mary's Church and churchyard looks exactly as a country church is supposed to look. At 1,300 feet above sea level it is said to be one of the highest churches in England. The view down the valley is breathtaking.

It is close to the ancient drover road from Wales into England. It may have been a shrine for the well that is now in Ladywell Cottage garden, just down the road. There is mention of its existence in 1276.

The early history of the church is preserved in its name, the Bettws – or bead house, first built as an oratory for Abbey Cwmhir in Wales. The Welsh church had a tradition of monks retiring to remote places to meditate and pray, which is why a Bettws is always found in a remote place. The monks will have drawn their water from the well at Ladywell, which may have been thought to have healing properties. It later came under the Priory at Much Wenlock, the monks making their journey on foot and staying in the round houses at Aston on Clun. It became a parish church on the Dissolution of the monasteries.

Little remains of the early church, but the nave probably dates from the 14th century, or the latter part of the 13th century, and the Spanish chestnut roof and beautiful rood screen were erected about two hundred years later. The chancel and porch are Victorian. An unusual feature is that the pews have the names of the farms painted on them.

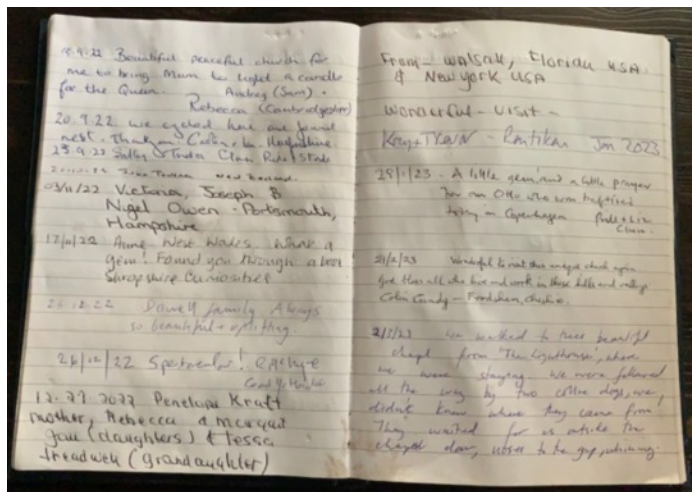
The Church is in good repair but expensive to heat. However, we have been fortunate in obtaining an annual electricity grant from the Powys Association for Voluntary Organisations (PAVO) which administers community funding provided by Garreg Llwyd wind farm. This covers the cost of our electricity. The church is cold, however, and the heating inadequate. We have obtained further funding from PAVO, and will soon see the installation of under-pew heating. Three years ago the same organisation provided the funding for outside lighting.

The Churchyard was very well maintained for many years by two heroic parishioners. Now in their nineties, they have retired, leaving a legacy hard to follow. However, teams of parishioners have volunteered to each maintain the churchyard for a month in the spring, summer and autumn. We are now managing the area along the principles of



'Caring for God's Acre', encouraging wild flowers to bloom in some areas.

The inside of the church has a lovely atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. It is small and welcoming. There is a rota of parishioners, who clean the church and provide flowers on a monthly basis. On special events they join together, with anyone who is willing to volunteer, to make the church look really special. The talent and creativity of the people of Bettws is remarkable, and indicates how much the church is loved.



Bettws visitors book

Bettws-y-Crwyn is a parish in a deeply rural area in South Shropshire. It is a dispersed parish, whose residents nestle among the hills - a truly rural parish, with no village settlement. Despite the scattered nature of the dwellings in the area, it is a vibrant community with good, if informal, communications, and an excellent record of co-operation. It is a caring community which is supportive of local events.

There are about 200 residents, some of whom are retired, and many of whom are, or have been, involved in farming. There is a growing number of young families and some home based businesses. The Parish Hall lies some distance from the church, having formerly been a school. It is run by a vibrant committee who work phenomenally hard to provide a well-used space for the community. In recent years a combination of grant funding and local fund raising has provided the means of among other things, a complete refurbishment and transformation of the kitchen.



Bettws Village Hall's refurbished kitchen

The Church and the Parish Hall are highly valued by the community, and the shared fund-raising events receive excellent support. Some years ago Bettws-y-Crwyn won the title 'Shropshire Village of the Year', and also the accolade of 'Best Community Spirit' for the Midlands. This was no mean feat for an area that is not actually a village. It is an accurate testament to the residents who form a cooperative and caring community.

Worship

Bettws and Newcastle share most worship

See page 11

Community Outreach

Bettws has a website (www.bettws.wordpress.com) with pages for the church giving its history, times of services and news and events. We have a leaflet for newcomers listing a great deal of useful information such as who's who, amenities and useful telephone numbers. The church, and the parish, make an effort to warmly welcome newcomers.

Members of the PCC and the congregation are involved in many activities within the Parish. These include 'formal' positions such as Treasurer and members of the Parish Hall Committee, Member of

the Parish Council, and Chair and members of the Parish Plan Committee.

Less formally, but of equal value, are those who organise and host monthly coffee mornings and the 100 Club draws, members of the WI, members of the Bettws Choir, those who organise social events such as concerts, harvest suppers, whist drives, craft workshops, progressive lunches, sponsored walks and numerous other activities throughout the year. These events are sometimes wholly, sometimes partly fundraisers for the church.

In addition to formal PCC meetings, its members occasionally hold 'kitchen meetings' in their homes to discuss particular issues. An example of this has been for Mission Action Planning.

The church is loved by the parish. It is felt to be very special. In many ways it is unique. It is situated in a dispersed deeply rural parish that has no village centre. People are loyal and supportive.



Bettws and Newcastle communities come together for a social evening



Coronation celebrations

St John the Evangelist, Newcastle on Clun

St John's is a quarter of a mile from the centre of Newcastle village, on a minor road to Whitcott Keysett, just off Offa's Dyke, with wonderful views over the upper Clun valley. It was built in 1848 by Edward Haycock on land given by the Earl of Powis. It has a hammer beam roof and lancet windows, pine pews, organ case and pulpit. The east window was designed by David Evans. It is in good repair, light and airy, warm and welcoming. It has an interesting lychgate which swivels in the middle like a turnstile. This has recently been listed. The churchyard is regularly maintained and is a credit to our church.

At the present time, Newcastle church is without a churchwarden and has only a skeleton PCC. There have been other problems locally with the threat of closure of the much loved village school and the closing of the village pub. Community action has saved the school and it is hoped that the pub, a hub for the village will reopen. However, morale is low and the church and community have needed support.



Children from Newcastle School make Christingles

Worship

Services are shared with St Mary's Bettws on a regular basis. The first in each month is held at St Mary's Bettws, the third at St John's Newcastle. Until recently a joint family service was held on the second Sunday, alternating churches each month.

The children from the school are involved with the harvest and Christmas services when the church is full. The Mothering Sunday service which is joint with Bettws and Clun is held in Newcastle Community Centre, again with a full attendance. Children from Newcastle school usually participate



in this, singing, reading and distribution of daffodils and some members of the congregation make simnel cake.

Over recent years there has been a strong connection between the churches in Newcastle and Bettws-y-Crwyn. We now regard ourselves as two churches with one congregation. This has been a considerable benefit to both churches.

The attendance at normal services is generally between 8 and 15. The average age 70. There is a core of regular attendees, supplemented by others when asked to read the lessons.

For services at special festivals or occasions, such as Harvest and Carol Service, the church is full. Children from Newcastle School and the Young Farmers are usually involved in these.

Community Outreach

Newcastle Community Centre is used by the church for the Mothering Sunday service, a joint service with Bettws and Clun. Other events which take place there involve surrounding communities. Particularly on special national occasions – such as jubilees – we have joined together to provide souvenir items for the children from both parishes.

St George's, Clun

St George's is the largest church building in the Benefice. It is on the site of an earlier Saxon church, which may itself have used the site of an ancient burial ground. Parts of the existing church date to the 12th century. Internally it is spacious with both north and south aisles. It was extensively rebuilt and restored in the last quarter of the 19th century under the direction of G.E. Street. In the course of this a plaster ceiling was removed from the north aisle to reveal 22 carved angels.

The south aisle was rebuilt and reduced in height which allowed the clerestory windows to be opened up. The present chancel was built to Street's design and some of the panelling from former box pews used in the Lady Chapel, which took the place of an earlier vestry.

The pulpit has Jacobean carving and there is also carving on the back of the ancient font which has been mounted on more recent columns.

The tower has had less rebuilding and may have been built for defence soon after the Norman nave. The number of bells has been gradually increased over centuries and is now ten. There is an active team of bell ringers.



Clun bell ringers and visiting ringers relax after the Coronation ring

The most significant change in recent years has been the installation of a kitchen and toilet in 2019 and the conversion of the adjacent south aisle into a seating area. Some reroofing has been done also, but there is concern that the main roof is reaching the end of its life.



St George's congregation worship regularly with Clun Methodist Church

Churchyard

The entrance to the churchyard is an early eighteenth century lychgate. It has not always been in its present position and was for a while at the Hand Causeway entrance.

The churchyard contains some trees of interest, in particular an ancient yew. The girth around the surviving ring of standards is about 33 feet suggesting that it is over 2,000 years old. The churchyard has been managed in conjunction with 'Caring for God's Acre', the northern part as a meadow.

In 2020 it became known that about two thirds of the churchyard including the whole north churchyard was closed for burials in 1893, but the records were lost in Ministry of Justice archives. Negotiations are proceeding to pass the liability for maintaining this part of the churchyard to the Town Council.

Near the lychgate is a War Memorial commemorating those from the area who died in the two world wars and also in Northern Ireland, and in the churchyard there are two Commonwealth War Graves. The annual Remembrance Service closes with the laying of wreaths at the Memorial.

Link with Clun Methodist Church

St George's has a close link with Clun Methodist Church. In 1995 a common Declaration of Intent was signed 'to make visible the unity of Christ's people in Clun'. This stops short of a Local Ecumenical Project and progress was also delayed by the reorganisation of the Benefice in 2012.

The present position is very much one of mutual respect and co-operation. There is a Methodist

member on the PCC and the Methodist Council Meetings are attended by a designated member of St George's PCC. Twice a month and alternating between the two churches the Sunday morning service is a combined one and the churches co-operate in community activities.

Finances

We paid £17,000 in Parish Offer in 2022, which represents about half our normal income. About £600 a month of our income is by standing order with associated gift aid. Our general fund balance is currently around £24,000. There are also restricted funds for building, bells, organ and churchyard totalling around £18,000.

Our biggest regular fundraising event is the annual Open Gardens towards the end of June which can raise up to £4,000 in a good year. In addition we get some income from concerts and other fundraising activities, currently including monthly bingo. We also support Shropshire Historic Churches Trust by taking part in their annual Ride and Stride event. This is an organisation from which we and other local churches have benefited.

The Church in our Community

Clun is a caring community with well established Good Neighbours and Good Friends Schemes offering support to members of the community and arranging things such as transport for hospital visits. Church members are represented in these organisations.



St George's hosts concerts of Clun Valley Music

The church is open every day and welcomes visitors, in particular hosting exhibitions, concerts and school events. It has good acoustics and has become the home of Clun Valley Music, a group of professional musicians who perform regularly attracting an audience from a wide area.

A group of people from the church and the wider community have put together a series of tableaux illustrating Bible stories, in fabric and other materials, known as Bible Yarns. This has been regularly displayed both at St George's and further afield.



Members of St George's display 'The Wedding of Cana', as part of the Bible Yarns Exhibition at a nearby church

The church has a link with The Muheza Hospice in Tanzania and Drs Karilyn and Richard Collins occasionally visit and update us on the work there. We also contribute funds raised at Harvest to the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution or other farming charities.

Hightown Community Room, Vicarage Road

The church has a church room for which it pays a nominal rental to Hereford Diocesan Board of Finance. It is managed by a committee under the general surveillance of the PCC. It has recently been reroofed with the help of a generous anonymous donation and other improvements have been funded by Covid related grants. It is frequently used for church events and funeral teas, but its main income comes from lettings and a monthly Produce Market.



Kneelers in Clun Church

Trinity Hospital, Clun

The Hospital of the Undivided Trinity, known locally as Trinity, was built in 1618 by Lord Henry Howard, the Earl of Northampton to house twelve 'poor men'. They tended to be single farm workers who were no longer able to work and so had to leave their tied cottage.

There were strong links with the church in Clun. Trinity now accommodates women as well as men and there are facilities for married couples. There is also a small chapel. Trinity is run as a Trust and the chapel does not come under the control of the Diocese of Hereford.

However, historic connections continue. The Vicar of Clun is an ex-officio Trustee and also titular Warden of Trinity Hospital.

The trustees allow the benefice to use the chapel for worship and the vicar is responsible for any worship that occurs there and for ensuring safeguarding procedures are adhered to. Until recently Holy Communion was held each Tuesday morning attracting worshippers from across the benefice. This has been reduced to monthly during the vacancy. It is hoped that a new incumbent would wish to include this possibility as part of their pattern of worship.



Gardens of Trinity, participating in Clun Gardens Open Event



...and in winter. This statue in the gardens at Trinity of two former residents is by a local sculptor

St Mary's, Clunton

The village of Clunton is in the parish of Clunbury. St Mary's Church was built in 1870 as a Chapel of Ease of St Swithin's Church, Clunbury and is situated in the centre of the village on the B4368. Built of local stone in the decorated style, it consists of a continuous nave and chancel, with a small north porch and western bell gable, and very little surrounding ground. An earlier mediaeval church existed in Clunton, but its history and even its location are uncertain.

Maintenance and Repair

The church is well cared for with a rota in place for cleaning and the provision of flowers. For festivals and special services, the church is decorated throughout by generous helpers. The small garden area at the front is tended regularly.

As required by our insurance, we have used Smart Water to mark the small amount of lead on the roof, the metal gates and railings, the brass cross and candlesticks.

In 2010, major repair works were undertaken on the roof and porch, funded almost entirely from the church funds. This has left our savings depleted and as yet we are unable to consider the required work to renew the heating systems.

Our Quinquennial inspection in 2021 reported the church in good condition and well cared for. The woodwork of the porch has been recently repainted and we will need to replace a few roof tiles.

Finance

Fundraising is vital to ensure the church stays functioning, but the events organised also provide popular social occasions and are well supported by the village. Every September a team of cyclists and walkers support the Shropshire Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride and raise sponsorship to share between the Trust and our church.

In 2017 we started a 100 Club, which has proved popular and was providing an income to the church of up to £600 pa. This has recently decreased to around £500 after losing some of our members.

The church is supported by regular giving through Gift Aided covenants, although again these have decreased recently. A special collection at the Harvest Festival goes to a charity eg. Wateraid, Christian Aid, Severn Hospice.

For 3 years from 2019, we had a year end deficit, so in 2022 we decided that for the first time we would have to decrease our Parish Offer. This resulted in a surplus at year end of £764. We have offered an increase this year but increasing utility and insurance costs are a concern, and it is difficult to warm the church in winter.

The Church in the Community

Our treasurer is the leader of an Open The Book team, that goes into Clunbury School twice a month. The children there enjoy the Bible stories and love



Children watch Punch and Judy at Purslow to be part of the dramatisation. At Easter and Christmas we hold Open the Book in the church and invite parents to attend.

Clunton residents are represented on the Parish Council, Parish Post team, South West Shropshire Gardening Club, and are the mainstay of the committee for the annual Purslow Sports, Show and Gymkhana. Clunton Scrumpers are a group who own fruit juicing equipment and local people can take along their apples or pears to the Village Hall on a specific weekend and take home fresh juice. A popular venture, and a welcome service to those with a lot of fruit trees.

Clunton, Clunbury and the school take part in Operation Christmas Child each year and send filled boxes through Samaritans Purse to under privileged children around the world.

Clunton is a close-knit community that enjoys all the social events and we have a very active village hall committee. We all work together to support the church, the village hall and the pub.



The show marquee at Purslow Show

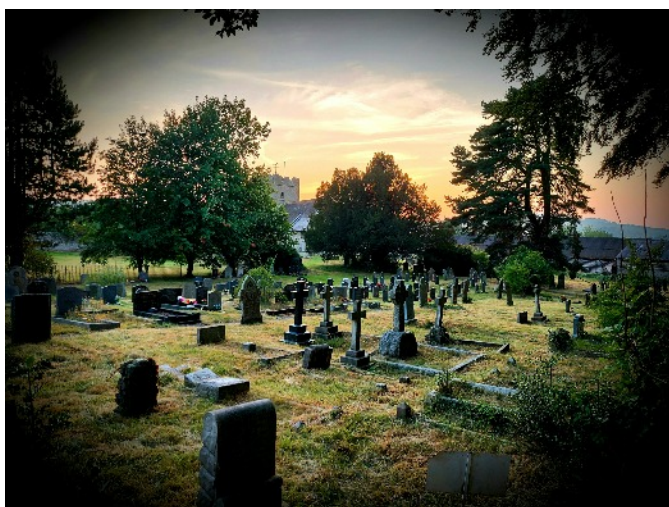
St Swithin's, Clunbury

The Grade 1 listed church was built in the 12th century but may have been constructed on an earlier religious site given the semi-circular wall to the west of the churchyard. It was extended in the late Norman period, and its tower has undergone various repairs over the centuries.

The building and the churchyard are in good condition. The six bells dating from 1620 to 1887 were restored and rehung in 2009. Quinquennial repairs from April 2016 have all been completed. A project to improve lavatory and kitchen facilities was undertaken in 2022 enabling a wider range of activities to be held in the church. The works also included improving access to the bell chamber with a new spiral staircase and installation of a more efficient boiler.

We are fortunate to have strong support in the community for regular maintenance tasks. Jobs such as churchyard mowing, flower arranging, cleaning, hoisting of flags and winding of clocks are done with great care and commitment. We have an enthusiastic group of bellringers who practise regularly. The church also has a good set of handbells which were put to good use during King Charles III Coronation celebrations.

A group of local volunteers trim the churchyard twice a year and most of the graves are well tended. Caring for God's Acre also assist with churchyard maintenance, and are fostering a wildflower meadow in an area of the churchyard.



PCC

There is an active and supportive PCC currently with 10 members. The group has a diverse range of experience in business, farming, architecture,



accountancy and teaching. There are 99 people on the Clunbury Electoral Roll.

Population

The school has brought several young families to the parish. However many members of the population are retired, with some of the farming families having lived in the area for more than three generations.

The main source of income in the area is agriculture and its ancillary businesses. Farms are mostly a mixture of livestock and arable, with many taking advantage of environmental schemes to boost their incomes. Farms of every size and type are proud of the food they produce and the landscape they sustain.

That landscape supports a second important source of income for the parish – tourism. Many visitors are drawn to the valley by the spectacular walking and cycling, whilst others may be looking to relax in a peaceful and picturesque setting. There are a number of successful holiday lets and bed and breakfasts offering all sorts of accommodation from barn conversions to luxury pods.

We have good superfast broadband infrastructure allowing some members of the community to run businesses or work from home. Otherwise people are engaged in a range of service jobs including gardeners, carpenters, fencing contractors and the other key trades such as plumbers and electricians.

Community Outreach

We have an excellent local newsletter, the Parish Post, which is distributed throughout the Parish and keeps us all in touch with local events and news. The Parish Post also has an excellent website and a presence on other social media platforms.

Members of the Church take their Christian values into many roles in our community. We have Parish

councillors, a magistrate, farmers, an accountant, parents and children of Clunbury School, members of the British Legion and South Shropshire Healthcare to name but a few.

The village hall committee organises a fortnightly coffee morning which helps foster a strong community spirit. The enthusiastic committee organises monthly entertainment and events, and members of the committee also sit on the PCC. Clunbury Parish is a supportive, lively, hospitable and caring community.

Finances

The church is financially sound, thanks partly to some generous legacies, and currently holds sufficient funds to pay our Parish Offer for 2023/2024. Several generous covenants are received, amounting to approximately £3,000 per annum.

Of the regular fundraising activities, the bi-annual promise auction held in the pub at Purslow raises the most money and demonstrates the generosity of the people in giving and enthusiastically bidding to support the church. A '100 Club' has been operating for 30 years, bringing in over £700 profit per annum. Again this is supported by people far and wide.

Special fundraising events were disrupted by Covid-19, but have since got back on course. There was a very successful Open Gardens event in the village in June 2022, raising over £3,000 shared equally with the Shropshire Historic Churches Trust. There are a host of other fundraising occasions held including barbeques, coffee mornings, garden teas, concerts and patronal festivals. All are well supported by the village and people connected with the church.

Worship

The pattern of services pre-vacancy, held between St Swithin's, Clunbury and St Mary's, Clunton included Holy Communion, Matins and Evensong, or a Service of Morning Worship. Regular congregations are small and mostly of older people, but the great festivals of the Church year are well attended by all ages. The provision of mulled wine and other refreshments as appropriate, adds to the sense of the Church's place at the heart of our community.



Prayers at the top of Clunbury Hill at the Good Friday Walk of Witness

On Good Friday a Walk of Witness takes place and a cross is carried up on to Clunbury Hill by children and adults from this and neighbouring parishes, with prayers being said en route. The cross stands out on top of the hill, a prominent marker of the Easter season.

A Remembrance day service is held in the church, followed by an Act of Remembrance at Purslow War Memorial.

The school uses the church at Christmas, Easter and at harvest festival, with children providing art work to decorate the church with at each celebration. At the school Leavers' Service in the summer the PCC gives a Bible to each leaver. These school services are well supported by the families and other members of the church community. Several of the families now come from outside the village and the provision of refreshments before the services has fostered good relationships.

Clunbury is a friendly, lively and enthusiastic parish who treasure St Swithin's Church and will welcome a new vicar who will be part of our community supporting us in outreach and pastoral care.



Carols round the tree in Clunbury churchyard

St Mary's, Hopesay

St Mary's Hopesay is ancient for the most part, having been built in the 12th century with later medieval additions and with some more recent late Victorian refurbishments particularly in the chancel area. The church is well used and carefully looked after, is clean and welcoming with a constant supply of flowers. Above all, visitors and the usual congregation alike attest that it has a good atmosphere and spirit. Regular weekly use ensures that this welcome is kept up and the maintenance and repair of the church is looked after by an enthusiastic PCC.

As it is situated in magnificent countryside between Hopesay Hill and a significant iron age fort, St Mary's is also visited by many walkers and the PCC has a policy of keeping the door open throughout the day. Many visitors comment appreciatively on the setting of the church with its wild, rural graveyard which at one time had sheep grazing within it to help keep the grass in trim. We were perhaps too famous for our unkempt rural style where the grass had to be held down to view the gravestones. Nowadays PCC members work hard to keep the main surrounding graveyard and pathways mown and weeded but the setting and layout remain unmistakably and attractively rural. We adhere to a conservation mowing plan when keeping the paths clear.

Average Size of Congregations

Communion Services 22, Morning Prayer 18, Informal Worship 19.

Occasionally there are visiting young adults and children; however the congregation is usually made up of adults over the age of 60. We have noted that during the last incumbency – in the space of about 12 months – the size of the congregation grew marginally but noticeably and that during 2023 this gentle increase has been sustained, with additions including church members of other parts of the benefice during the vacancy.

Electoral Roll and Parochial Church Council

There are currently 52 on the Electoral Roll. The PCC has 10 members and meets four times a year either in church, or in PCC members' homes. During the Coronavirus crisis we conducted some meetings about specific issues, such as opening the church for private prayer, by means of online Zoom meetings.

Worship



The PCC has for many years maintained services at the Church every Sunday (except on the 5th Sunday of a month when the Benefice service is elsewhere). At Hopesay, enabling the continuation of four successive services each month has in large part depended on the efforts of lay service leaders, on the first and third Sundays. Our Reader, Sonia Phippard, organised and led Sunday services by means of Zoom during the lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021.

St Mary's congregation is enthusiastic in worship and inspired by good preaching from the Bible. A monthly Bible Study is also held.

There are special festival services on Good Friday, at Easter, Harvest and Christmas. Our Christmas Carol service with visiting community choir, mince pies and mulled wine is especially popular.

Refreshments are served after every service. This is no mean feat given there is currently only an outside tap and no sink!

Finances

Hopesay was one of the first in the Diocese to adopt the Parish Giving Scheme and this has proved successful in helping to increase income in recent years.

In 2022 our total income was £27,233 including £5,801 restricted funds. Expenditure totalled £17,849 including £598 from restricted funds.

Our current Parish Offer to the Diocese is £10,500, an increase of £1,000 over 2022.

Pastoral Care and Community Outreach

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in active participation of the congregation in worship at the church and in taking part and organising activities which raise the profile of the

church's mission in the community. We hold, for example, our annual Harvest Lunch open to all in the Village Hall in Aston on Clun. At the outset of the first lockdown the PCC took active part in a community-led scheme to ensure that the most vulnerable parishioners had access to food and other supplies as they shielded or self-isolated.



The reverse Advent Calendar

For the first time, in 2022, a Reverse Advent Calendar was set up. A magnificent structure for this was crafted by a PCC member and enhanced by beautiful drawings by a village artist. This proved very popular in the church and community,

overflowing with gifts for a local Women's Refuge.

The church also collects donations for the Craven Arms Food Bank, supports Self Help Africa through a Harvest lunch each October, and weekly refreshment donations are given to Water Aid.

Improvement plans in hand at St Mary's

Apart from paying close heed to the repair and maintenance requirements of the Quinquennial Report the PCC has been working keenly to make improvements within and outside the church. A major project finished in 2016 involved the upgrade of a formerly expensive and inefficient heating system. We have also restored running water to the church. Significant repairs to the roof of the lychgate were also carried out.

For some years the PCC has explored how to make best use of the area surrounding the Victorian font at the back of the church where, in cramped conditions, coffee and refreshments are served at the end of each service. Now, plans for a discreet kitchen area have been drawn up and are awaiting faculty approval. One challenge in this respect is the awkward position of the Victorian font, installed in 1856, which is mostly redundant now since we brought back the original Saxon font from Bryn Church near Clun – where it spent a 100-year holiday – to its place inside the door. A new position for the Victorian font has been located close to the vestry at the back of the nave and its removal, with the kitchen facility, will free up the area for informal gatherings and serving refreshments.

Not least among the PCC's advanced plans, is the building of an external compost-based toilet for use by the congregation and visitors. After some years of consideration, the new building has been sited, designed, costed and planning permission received.

Recent fundraising activities have been well supported by the community. These have included Carol Singing, Soup and Pudding Lunch and a sumptuous Afternoon Tea.



The Parish

Hopesay parish also includes the villages of Aston on Clun, Broome and some surrounding hamlets. The parish has an active community with a volunteer-staffed shop, village hall and village green at Aston on Clun. The village also has a friendly garage which carries out MOTs and servicing; there is also a timber merchant and a pub with a garden.

There are campsites in Aston on Clun and Broome and the parish is visited regularly by a library van and post office van.

The village hall screens popular films and live performances from the National Theatre. There is a fortnightly coffee morning and a



monthly craft market, line dancing, Women's Institute and other activities.

Aston has an annual Arbor Day and Village Fete on the last Sunday in May when the Black Poplar tree in the centre of the village is decorated with flags.

Schools in the Benefice

St George's C E Academy, Clun

Our school, nestled in the Clun Valley, with the River Clun running through its heart, and surrounded by the beautiful South Shropshire hills, offers a creative, challenging and nurturing environment for our children.



St George's School celebrate St George's Day in church

We currently have 95 children at St George's and in September 2023 we will be a four-class school. As a small rural school, we get to know each of our children very well. We ensure that each child is valued as an individual, with many returning as parents and even grandparents themselves! We are proud of our high-quality nursery with excellent



St George's Nursery Class



facilities for three to five year olds in our Foundation Stage Unit.

The school values its Church status and has links with St George's Church, a 2-minute walk from the school. We continue to build a real partnership between home, school and the local community with this relationship being developed on values of mutual trust and respect.

Our connections with the Church are as old as the school itself and are fundamental to the ethos of our teaching at St. George's.

The School aims to serve its community by providing education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to all pupils.

As a former Voluntary Aided Church School, collective worship lies at the heart of the school day and allows everyone to gather as one community. Within the context of Christian belief and practice, worship includes active engagement, praise, readings, drama, prayers, and reflection.

As a school committed to preparing children to be responsible, educated, future citizens, our children have access to a wide range of spiritual, social, moral and cultural (SMSC) experiences throughout the year. As a rural school we ensure we make the most of the surrounding and wider facilities to enrich our curriculum including: work with community members and groups, Shropshire Library and Museum Service, sporting facilities, local and visiting theatre companies, trips to experience

different cultures and Walcot Arboretum, where 'Forest School' is well-established and integrated into our school life. Our curriculum is built around enriching our children's lives and we aim to do this every day.

We believe that children should have the opportunity to be responsible citizens and understand their impact on the world around them, both local and worldwide. All children have the opportunity during their time at school to be an active part of groups and teams to develop and apply these skills. Children are elected by their classmates to the following roles: School Council, Eco Warrior, House Captain, Sports Leader, Playground Pal, Digital Leader and Librarian. During the school year we also take part in a range of charity events and projects to learn about, develop and care for the area in which we live such as Caring for God's Acre Burial Grounds Project, working in the burial grounds of St George's Church.

Rebecca Manning
Head teacher



St George's School Coronation Picnic

Clunbury CE Primary School

What would we like our new vicar to be like?

In our Church of England (Aided) primary school, which is part of the Blue Hills Federation, the vicar is an incredibly important figure. They are part of our family. We would like someone who can help guide our school leaders with the often challenging decisions that have to be made, by being part of our governing body. The governors have a central role in every aspect of our school structure and therefore someone who is able to come to this role with enthusiasm, wisdom and drive is crucial.

In our Federation, our vision: 'Teach children how they should live, so they remember it all their lives' (Proverbs 22:6) is paramount in laying the foundation for our school community. We would like our vicar to be able to help us develop and deliver this through all areas of school life, including our curriculum, our teaching, and how we help children use the school values in their lives to make them into the future adults that our world needs and deserves. Often, a school vicar can embody this through weekly collective worships

but also supporting children within their day to day lives.

Children often find some of the 'big' Christian questions tricky to comprehend and we would like to have an incumbent who can make these understandable and accessible to all. Furthermore, it is essential that the children are able to build a relationship with them in order to feel confident and comfortable to ask further questions in order to develop their understanding of the Christian faith to the next level.

Clunbury school would love to have a vicar who is approachable, friendly and able to communicate to children on their level but also be there to support staff and be that friendly face that everyone looks forward to seeing each week. An incumbent who is supportive and gracious, who can relate with the children so that they love coming to church, would be our greatest wish so to enable the community of Clunbury to have a growing, young congregation to continue to secure the future of our school and church.

Kathryn Jones
Lead Teacher

Newcastle CE Primary School

Newcastle CE Primary School is situated in the village of Newcastle, four miles up the valley from Clun. It is a small Church of England school with 25 currently on roll. The school is part of The Blue Hills Federation, which was formed in September 2017 to support the education of children in rural areas and is led by the Executive Head Teacher, Miss Anna Cook, and the Lead Teacher on the site - currently a temporary appointment, Mr Chris Richards, taking up his appointment in September. At the heart of the school is its vision and values which are the same as those for The Blue Hills Federation and we pride ourselves on the family ethos of the school regularly referring in collective worship with the children of the school as 'our family'.



A very recent OFSTED visit resulted in the school deemed as 'good':

There is a family feel to Newcastle CofE Primary. Because of its size, everyone knows and cares for one another. Older pupils look after younger pupils and are positive role models to them. For example, they play an active role in assemblies to encourage all to take part. At social times, pupils from all year groups play happily together. They respect any differences between them. One pupil captured the feelings of others, describing the school as 'special' because of how well everyone gets on with each other.

Pupils enjoy their lessons and time in school. They rise to the high expectations their teachers have of them. They like the opportunities to learn in different ways. This includes learning in the outdoor classroom and forest school. Pupils go on

memorable trips to enhance their learning, such as to museums and a historic prison.

The Christian values underpin the school's culture. Pupils demonstrate these values in their conduct and positive attitudes.

The children who attend Newcastle CE Primary School travel from a wide catchment area of approximately 5 miles at its furthest point, which covers three parishes: Newcastle, Bettws-y-Crwyn and Llanfair Waterdine. Some children travel further as they come from across the Welsh border.

The school has been highly involved in the community taking part in a number of church services during the year at St John the Evangelist's Church in Newcastle - Harvest festival, Remembrance, Carol Service, Mothering Sunday service – as well as supporting events such as the Newcastle Garden Show where the school supports the children in entering many of the children's competition categories. In the church services mentioned, the children take an integral role, reading, singing, and in the Remembrance service, laying a cross for each of the fallen from the parishes of Newcastle and Bettws-y-Crwyn as well as laying two wreathes. The school also regularly displays work in the church based on the time of year and work they have been carrying out as part of the RE curriculum within the school and holds its own services at Easter and a Leavers' service at the end of the year in the church. Twice yearly the school performs to the community: a traditional nativity with a twist in the community centre at Christmas and a musical or play on the school grounds at the end of the summer term. These events are well supported by the community with as many as 100 - 120 people watching. This involvement allows the children to understand where our small rural school family belongs within our community and is an important part of school life.



A final word

The Clun Valley offers beautiful countryside, welcoming and supportive communities, a good quality of life for most, neighbourliness and lots of activities.

The church community is positive, supportive and welcoming.

We eagerly await a new vicar to join us.



*Joan
Benefice Administrator*



*Valerie, Churchwarden
Bettws-y-Crwyn*



*Frank, Churchwarden
Clun*



*Churchwarden vacancy
Newcastle*



*David, Churchwarden
Clunbury*



*Karl, Churchwarden
Clunbury*



*Pat, Chair
Clunton Committee*



*Giles, Churchwarden
Hopesay*



*Phil, Churchwarden
Hopesay*



*Heather
Benefice Safeguarding
officer*