

THE SIX PILGRIMS

PARISH

PROFILE

2024



All Saints
ALFORD



Holy Cross
BABCARY



St Peter
HORNBLOTTON



St Thomas a Becket
LOVINGTON



St Nicholas
NORTH BARROW



St Peter
SOUTH BARROW

In the midst of the rolling Somerset countryside lives a vibrant band of Christians who embrace the title of the Six Pilgrims – steadfastly travelling each Sunday to whichever of the six churches they share that are holding witness.

It's a land of quiet for the birdsong, dark for the stars and safe enough to leave your door unlocked. A place where people stop to talk to neighbours and strangers alike. In all, they number but 750 souls of all shapes and sizes, ages, backgrounds and beliefs.

The active members of the Six Pilgrims hold to their faith and not only efficiently manage the affairs of their individual churches but reach out to the "silent majority" that doesn't worship regularly while still wanting the church to be there for the big family events, the sense of continuity and the focus of village life.

When one village (South Barrow) had difficulty in developing a community spirit through the absence of post office, shop, pub or parish hall their Parochial Church Council (PCC) raised over £100,000 to re-order their church's interior to provide a kitchen and disabled-access WC and has now become a flourishing centre of social and leisure activities – ranging from a handicraft group to a gardening club, from a "pop-up" shop to a film society.

And waiting in the heart of that same village is an attractive three-bedroomed cottage, – to provide a comfortable home for a resident priest ready to join the Six Pilgrims and lead them on to even greener pastures.

Could that be you?

Someone to live and work amongst us – to wear a dog-collar in the pub or at the fete (metaphorically if not literally).

Someone who will enjoy the pace, smells and sounds of rural life but also relishes the challenge of welding together six tiny communities spread across 16 square miles of winding lanes and lofty hedges.

Someone happy to let the church wardens and the PCC's shoulder most of the administrative burdens while adding a physical presence to God's Word through pastoral visits to those in need and those who are merely alone.

Someone whose both hobby and passion is their flock, who will enjoy working with and mentoring the Reader and encouraging even greater lay leadership in tackling the problems facing the wider church in these difficult times.

Are you ready to join our pilgrimage?

The Six Pilgrims:

All Saints ALFORD,
St Peter HORNBLUTTON,
St Nicholas NORTH BARROW,

Holy Cross BABCARY,
St Thomas a Becket LOVINGTON,
St Peter SOUTH BARROW

Deanery; Bruton and Cary,

Diocese; Bath and Wells,

Appointment of an Interim House for Duty Minister of the Six Pilgrims

Background :

- In 1993 the Six Pilgrims began a new life under the leadership of a retired priest. It was agreed that the priest would provide the pastoral and liturgical input whilst the laity would run everything that did not require a priest. The idea being that apart from gentle guiding and leadership from the priest, the nitty-gritty of parochial activity such as finance, benefice events etc would be undertaken by the laity, leaving the priest free to be simply “a parish priest”
- We believe this arrangement has great merit, borne out by the fact that we have had only four priests in the intervening period, who have been highly successful in moulding individual parishes together and thoroughly enjoying their ministry with us
- In 2024, 31 years later, this deal remains our guiding principle in the relationship we seek to offer our new priest
- Following a long interregnum we appointed a priest who made a real difference to our worship both pre Covid and then with popular online short services. Unfortunately she suffered from Covid herself and as a result has had to retire but we appreciate the value of having a priest to guide us.

The following is designed to give you a brief guide to our situation. We would encourage anyone interested to contact and visit us; join us at a service and get a feel for who we are or speak to Simon Hoar, Chair of the Six Pilgrims.

Who are we?

We live in a land of quiet for the birdsong, dark for the stars and safe enough to leave your door unlocked. A place where people stop to talk to neighbours and strangers alike. In all, we number 750 souls of all shapes and sizes, ages, backgrounds, beliefs. All of our six churches stand on ancient foundations and are beautifully maintained.

This corner of Somerset is very rural; the working backbone is still farming interspersed with a variety of small enterprise businesses, plus a major employer in a helicopter manufacturer at nearby Yeovil and a military presence at the Royal Naval Air Station at Yeovilton.

Nestling east of the busy A37, Fosse Way, and the A303, you will find the Somerset countryside at its best. Small fields, grazing cattle and sheep, wild flower meadows and a botanically rich SSSI nature reserve. The whole overlooked to the south by Cadbury Hill (thought to be possibly the site of where King Arthur set his Camelot) and to the north by the legendary Glastonbury Tor (reputedly the Isle of Avalon, final resting place of Arthur). Stonehenge, the Jurassic Coast and Exmoor are within easy reach.

Scattered among the Six we have a lively Church of England primary school of about 40 pupils at Lovington, a village pub, a nursery and an artisan bakery. But, alas, no shop!

Two of our churches, Hoy Cross at Babcary and St Peter at South Barrow, have been re-ordered via the removal of pews to provide catering and toilet facilities and so stage public events of appeal to a wider audience than regular churchgoers. Lovington church has also undergone major reordering to provide a toilet, servery and meeting room. Hornblotton is working towards a major restoration of its magnificent sgraffito plasterwork.

Social life is active. Each of the six parishes has its own pattern of village activities: Sports days, Bonfire Night, wassailing, boules competitions, sponsored walks, road races. Coffee mornings, folk music concerts, a film society, harvest suppers, fetes and bazaars. Quiz nights, auctions of promises, antiques evenings, flower festivals.

So many ways in which we strengthen our community spirit and raise the funds to keep the Six financially viable.

As a Benefice we have adopted "Tools for Self Reliance" as a charity and we aim to raise funds for them throughout the year which they use to re-condition donations of hand tools that are then sent out to remote areas of Africa. We also support Help for Homeless" a local charity providing food and shelter in our local towns

The Christian calendar provides more opportunities for interactivity -- Palm Sunday parades with donkeys, Good Friday processions behind a large cross, beating of the bounds on Rogation Sunday as well as children being encouraged to create their own Christingle symbols and to bring their pets to an open-air service in the churchyard.

Life is rarely dull in this secluded corner of Somerset.

To see pictures (and lots more) of the Six Pilgrims go to our **Six Pilgrims Facebook page** which was also used for our online services during covid. Several of the villages also have their own Facebook and Whatsapp groups.



What do we offer?

- Friendly, willing, committed congregations and communities
- A three bedroom cottage, house for duty, in the heart of South Barrow. Rent, council tax and water rates are paid
- The chance to live and work in a beautiful part of rural Somerset
- All reasonable travel and out of pocket expenses are paid by the Benefice
- Hours of work: 6 sessions per week (a “session” being a morning, afternoon or evening) including Sunday services ie. three days a week including Sundays
- Six weeks holiday pa. (including 6 Sundays off)
- Note that the Resident Minister does not get any fees for weddings or funerals. The fees are split between the PCC and Diocese. To give an idea of numbers, in 2023 we had 9 baptisms and 5 so far this year, 3 weddings and 5 planned for this year, 10 funerals and 6 burial of ashes.
- The precise terms and conditions are subject to agreement with the Diocese

What does the job involve?

- Within the confines of 6 sessions per week; to be House for Duty Priest in charge of the Six Pilgrims Group of Parishes
- To lead the sacramental services and occasional offices
- To attend social events, whenever practicable, to be a visible presence in the community and to lead the pastoral care of our communities
- To lead and work closely with the Reader and the Churchwardens who are responsible for the day to day running of the parishes and to mentor and develop the lay leadership within the Six Pilgrims
- To work with our Reader and others in the non-sacramental services; matins, family/children services, funerals and others
- To work closely with colleagues in Bruton and Cary Deanery of which the Six Pilgrims is a part.
- The Interim Minister is appointed during times of change, to help lead the benefice into the next phase of its life and part of the role will be to help the Six Pilgrims build a relationship with the benefice of Castle Cary and Ansford, with a view to future working.
- Attendance at the quarterly churchwardens meetings is important but attendance at individual PCC meetings is not expected (although always welcome)

Who are we looking for?

- Vision and encouragement
- Broad pastoral links with the communities
- A readiness to work with people of all ages; young and old, committed Christians and the curious, current congregational members, the lapsed and the new
- An interest, understanding and enjoyment of the countryside and the people within it
- A constructive working relationship with the vicar of the adjacent Benefice of Castle Cary and Ansford.
- Reasonable computer skills for email, Excel and Word documents and some familiarity with social media
- A current driving licence and a car is almost essential
- A sense of humour is definitely essential

What are the church services like?

- The style of worship generally tends towards traditional “central churchmanship”, but with a wide following of Christian denominations within the congregation including Catholics, Methodists, and Baptists we aim to provide something for everyone. There are no other churches in the Six Pilgrims
- Currently we have a mix of services across our six parishes to try and appeal to the breadth of people living in our communities. Our mainstay service is a traditional sung holy communion but we have regular Celtic and other styles of services. We are aware that although our traditional forms of service are popular, there are others, particularly families with small children, that find them difficult. Our family service once a month is popular with children and adults. Pre-covid these services often included a drama or other children’s activity. Post covid we have yet to rebuild our children attendance at our Family services and restart children’s activities. We have Palm Sunday parades with donkeys, pet services, Cowboy services, Christingles and a very well attended Nativity Trail. In a more traditional form we have a Good Friday walk carrying a large cross with reflections on the stations of the cross, followed by a service and in Advent many carol services
- Since we lost our House for Duty priest we have reduced our usual two Sunday services to a single Sunday service at 10.30am which is rotated around the six churches. The service varies between a traditional sung Eucharist, a traditional matins and a contemporary worded Family service.
- Pre-covid when we had a dedicated priest we had two services each Sunday, a 9am sung Eucharist and a 1030am service which would either be another sung Eucharist or matins or a Family Service. On the fourth Sunday of the month, we would have a single 1030am joint benefice Eucharist often linked to the parish patronal festivals and in the summer an evensong or songs of praise as well.
- Numbers vary considerably depending on the service. A usual Sunday congregation will be between 15 and 25 and this will swell to 40 to 60 for baptisms and major festivals such as Christmas Day, Easter Day, Mothering Sunday, Harvest and Remembrance. Since the departure of our last priest in 2021 we have maintained one service per Sunday with the help of our Reader and a valiant

band of retired clergy

- We hold a traditional Matins service once a month which has a good following from inside and outside the Benefice
- Major festivals are well attended e.g. at Christmas 2023, over 400 people attended across 4 services.
- We have had a good number of special services in recent years which are always well attended. Since July 2021, when lockdown was lifted, we have held 24 baptisms, 9 weddings with 5 weddings planned for 2024. This year we have two candidates for confirmation on Easter Saturday in Wells Cathedral. In addition, since 2021, we have held some 42 funerals, memorials and burial of ashes.
- We have a love of good music and singing with a number of organists, and an electronic music machine.
- We have six welcoming and friendly congregations
- We have a core travelling congregation, living both in the benefice and beyond, that will travel about the benefice to wherever the services are being held
- We are well served by a Reader; licensed in Oct 2010 who takes many of the non- sacramental services
- Our links with our primary school in Lovington are strong and we arrange with the school usually two services each term based on the church year, together with weekly assemblies/group worship. We are encouraging the children to take the lead in organising their services



How is the administration of the six churches and the Benefice organised?

- Each parish has its own independent administrative and pastoral set up with church wardens and PCC. i.e. each village has two church wardens and a team to run the church services and identify and support parish pastoral care. Although it is true that the system is creaking in some parishes, by keeping the church responsibilities within the parish community and therefore church administration and pastoral care close to the villages we can work together to resolve these issues.
- The Six Pilgrims Committee meets quarterly with all churchwardens, the Resident Minister and Six Pilgrims Treasurer with the aim of co-ordinating the benefice activities, developing a close link for all Six to the Resident Minister and developing a strong strategy for the future. The committee selects a chairperson from the churchwardens who is the main link between the priest and the parishes
- The Six Pilgrims Events Committee (currently in abeyance) has a remit to a) foster community spirit and b) raise church funds. The committee has a chairperson and a member from each parish. It organises an annual programme of events including; sponsored walks, Castle Cary Coffee Morning, talks and slide shows, quiz evenings and special events such as auction of promises.
- We produce the monthly “Six Pilgrims Magazine” which is distributed free to all 450 households in the Benefice. It carries both community and church news and local advertising and is widely read.

We have a Six Pilgrims facebook page where church and other news is shared and where our online video services are posted. There are other village facebook pages and whatsapp groups that link to the Six Pilgrims page and share posts.



What about the Finances and Fabric?

- Each parish runs its own finances and, whilst the financial state of each one differs and none of them are well endowed, they are all solvent and the Parish Share is paid.
- Each of the six churches is well maintained with Quinquennial surveys reasonably up to date. Three of the churches need significant repairs but plans are in hand to get grant funding.
- The parish share is allocated to the Six Pilgrims as a whole by the Diocese and the annual figure is split into six shares for payment by the parishes and a seventh share for payment by the Six Pilgrims central fund. The parish shares are not equal but adjusted to the size of the parish
- Parish revenue comes from the plate gifts of the congregation, specific parish giving (much of it gift aid), individual parish fund raising events and Six Pilgrims joint fund raising
- A central Six Pilgrims account distributes funds raised and deals with the Six Pilgrims magazine accounts and other central expenses
- The largest church, Holy Cross, Babcarly has been re-ordered with chairs and provides a large flexible space. In 2013 a Servedy & WC was installed in the churchyard to make the church more suitable for community events and in 2018 a new West Gallery with ringing platform was installed. Replacement of the chancel roof is now required and fund raising is underway.
- The small church of St Peter, South Barrow completed a major re-ordering in 2016; replacing pews with chairs, installing a new floor and installing kitchen and WC facilities to make a multifunctional village amenity. This has proved to be a very popular and successful improvement which has rejuvenated the church as the focal point of the community
- The church of St Thomas a Becket Lovington installed an accessible toilet, servedy, and a tower gallery meeting space in 2022 to integrate the church further into the community while the church of St Peter, Hornblotton is busy raising funds for a major restoration of its unique Arts & Crafts sgraffito plasterwork.
- All Saints, Alford (not to be outdone!) is also planning an internal reordering to bring a WC and servedy area into the church.

What is the House for Duty like?

The house for duty was acquired in 2018, a three bedroom Victorian semi-detached cottage situated in a quiet lane in South Barrow just a stone's throw from the church. The house is in a good state of repair and it has a very attractive garden and on street parking for two cars. Full details and more pictures are available.



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Life in the Six Pilgrims

Nestling between the busy A37 and the almost as busy B3153 you will find Somerset countryside at its best. Small fields, grazing cattle, hedges adorned profusely with wild flowers and, apart from the moments when helicopters from Yeovilton clatter overhead, it is quiet. The six parishes which have been here for many centuries comprise the second smallest benefice in Somerset.



The Benefice demographics cover a wide social spectrum: families with children, single parents, single households young to elderly, retired locals and retired to the area. Full demographic details on the Six Pilgrims taken from the 2011 census returns can be found on the Bath & Wells Diocesan website within the "Churches and Parishes" tab under "Parish Spotlight". Each of the six parishes can be viewed separately.

Communal Village Life

Each of the six parishes has its own pattern of unique village events such as Sports Day, Bonfire Night, Rounders, Boules, Clock golf, Community Shop, Toddler Groups, Wassailing Night, Road Race, Folk Music Concerts, Harvest Suppers, fetes and bazaars. On top of these is overlaid the Six Pilgrim events.





Wildlife

For those with an interest in walking and wildlife we are situated in a predominately dairying area crossed by many footpaths and containing a botanically rich SSSI nature reserve with two other nature reserves adjacent to us. We are a short drive from the Avalon Marshes nature reserves with their breeding Bitterns, Great White Egrets, Marsh Harriers and Otters. An hour's drive will take you to the Mendip Hills whilst slightly longer takes you to the Quantock Hills. The churches themselves mostly have designated wildlife areas and some have the Bronze Eco Church award.

Places of Interest

Within easy reach of the Six Pilgrims we have National Trust properties at Lytes Cary, Stourhead, Montacute and Barrington Court. Just to the South we have a Haynes Motor Museum at Sparkford and the Fleet Air Arm Museum at Yeovilton whilst Glastonbury Tor and Abbey and the world famous Glastonbury Festival are only a short drive away. More recently, near Bruton "The Newt" has opened, itself not far from the Hauser & Wirth arts centre.



Flooding

The area of the Six Pilgrims is not on the Somerset Levels but it is predominantly low lying. We have two rivers, the Cary and the Brue, feeding water from a wide catchment area down to the Levels. Heavy rainfall after a prolonged wet spell can lead to a rapid rise in river and ditch water levels with surface water spilling over from the fields onto the roads and footpaths. Whilst the main roads are not flooded for any lengthy period the back lanes can remain impassable for many days for all except tractors and four wheel drives.

Bruton & Cary Deanery

Bruton and Cary Deanery is a predominantly rural deanery in the south east corner of the Diocese. It is made up of 41 parishes, mostly consisting of small villages and the surrounding farms, with larger centres of population at Evercreech, Bruton, Castle Cary, Wincanton, Milborne Port, Henstridge and Templecombe. Detailed information about the Deanery can be found on its website, <https://www.brutonandcarydeanery.net>

In July 2023, the Deanery Synod approved the Deanery Plan envisaging the reduction of stipendiary incumbents from 8.5 to 7. Following this vote, it was recognised that a number of interim measures needed to be put in place to enable parishes and benefices to be able to implement this plan effectively. This current appointment forms one of those measures.

Deanery Synod meets three times per year to promote the whole mission of the Church in the Deanery and to consider matters of interest to the parishes within the Deanery. Shared initiatives take place such as holding Deanery Lay Worship Assistant training courses.

Clergy Chapter meets monthly for prayer, support, encouragement and discussion of matters of mutual interest and concern and the Chapter looks forward to welcoming the future Interim House for Duty Priest for Six Pilgrims as a valued colleague.

How do I find out more?

Please contact:

The Revd Charlie Peer
Acting Archdeacon of Wells

Email: ADWells@bathwells.anglican.org to arrange a time to speak.

Or

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