

THE BENEFICE OF MERE AND WEST KNOYLE



Benefice Profile 2024

Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the post of parish priest of Mere with West Knoyle. This is a super opportunity for creative ministry in two parishes newly joined as a united benefice, within one of the most attractive parts of Wiltshire.

I am looking for devoted and visionary clergy, who can inspire and lead our churches in Making Jesus Known – our new diocesan vision. While this can appear a timeless landscape, our parishes are constantly changing and face all the challenges and opportunities of life in the 2020s. There is so much potential for growth in this benefice: centred around the delightful small town of Mere, we hope it will become beacon for rural mission in the south of the county.

In the Diocese of Salisbury, we place a high value on the encouragement and pastoral support of our parish clergy and, should God guide you to serve here, you will become part of a committed and collaborative team.

Please contact the Ramsbury office if you need any assistance with your enquiry and be assured of my prayers as you seek the Lord's will for your future.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Andrew Rumsey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail.

Andrew Rumsey, Bishop of Ramsbury.

Our Vision

We seek to 'make Jesus known' in our communities through inspiring worship, committed local outreach and loving pastoral care. While offering a 'classic' parochial setting for mission and ministry, we recognise the urgent need for renewing our strength and vision for a new era.

Our churches are at the heart of our communities and are well-loved by local residents. We are dedicated to remaining at the centre of community life but conscious too of the need to extend our presence and contact with the school, care facilities and new housing estates.

We have some wonderful and committed volunteers serving congregational life, yet if we are to grow and thrive, we shall need effective coordination and succession planning for church officers, PCC members and the discernment of new vocations to ministry and service.

We hope, likewise, to grow in financial stewardship and have set ourselves the target of meeting parish share payments in this new season. We know this will ask much of us – and our new priest – but are confident in the promise of Christian life in these places, and ready for the growing season!

Our New Priest

We are truly looking forward to our new vicar of Mere and West Knoyle and feel sure they will find here a warm welcome, a fulfilling ministry and an appealing home setting.

We seek an active and forward-thinking priest, who will reach out to the whole community, building our congregations and encouraging the involvement of young people.

Hoping our new priest will value our traditions while leading us in new pathways, we need someone who will be comfortable leading a range of liturgical styles. Grounded in the Eucharist, they will be an able and inspiring teacher and, ideally, have an interest in church music and developing this dimension of worship and mission.

Pastoral care of all who live in these communities matters greatly to us, and so our priest will likewise value their 'cure of souls', offering an open and inclusive welcome to church life and discipleship.

Our parishes

ST MICHAEL THE ARCHANGEL, MERE



Mere is a delightful little town of 3,600 inhabitants, lying under the downs and facing the Blackmore Vale. Built mostly of the local stone it is dominated by Castle Hill. Sadly, the castle was pulled down over 600 years ago.

On the other side of Castle Hill is the A303, providing good east/west communication. A train station (Waterloo to Exeter) is 4 miles away. Bath and Salisbury under an hour away. A day out at the seaside is easily possible.

In the middle of town there is a small market square surrounded by shops: a Co-op, restaurants and pubs. All the major supermarkets are in Gillingham and in Shaftesbury, which has fresh fish from the coast on Thursdays. There are two new estates, one in the course of construction. These bring a younger, working population.

On the outskirts of the town are two industrial estates containing a garage, Farris the candle maker, Hill Brush and Godminster Cheese, amongst many more specialist trades.

We have an award-winning surgery but are the furthest from a hospital (Salisbury) in Wiltshire. There is hardship here amongst the elderly and rural

poor and the food bank is busy. Mere is awash with activities! A quick glance at Mere Mutters on Facebook will show a range from a theatre club to boules.

As everywhere social media is important. By the time you read this we will have converted to fibre broadband. The sites you need are:

www.merewilts.org (Including Mere Matters)
Facebook, Mere Mutters



ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH



One glance at Pevsner or Simon Jenkins will tell you that the church is special. It contains most of what a church aficionado needs: rare rood screen, chantry chapels, brasses, interesting memorials and much more. It is much loved and well looked after. The setting is idyllic.

The congregation numbers about 50 at the main Sunday service. On high days and holidays the church is full: the footfall this Christmas was over 700. Weddings, funerals, Remembrance Sunday and other special services are well attended.

Our pattern of worship is 8am (BCP) Communion, 1030am Eucharist (CW), a lay-led service especially welcoming to families on the first Sunday and matins on the fifth. Other services follow the liturgical year.

We have been in vacancy for two and a half years. Despite such a long vacancy the Church has, in every sense, been kept vibrant through the support of a huge team of committed and very active volunteers from the flower arrangers, bellringers, clock maintainers, sound technicians, retired clergy, acolytes, servers, readers, rota schedulers, organisers of prayer groups, fundraisers, event managers and administrators – all committed to support the Church. There is ample scope for expansion into the younger community and the new estates. You will be the only priest in Mere. The RC and Methodist churches have closed, and the URC is small. Churches Together survives and the Roman Catholic congregation worship once a month in St Michael's.



We are very grateful to clergy who have rallied round to minister to us. They have been ably supported by the laity.

We do not have a full-time organist at the moment. However, we are fortunate to have a mixture of pipe organ, electric organ, keyboards and a hymn machine. There is a small choir which is enlarged by a festival choir on occasions.



There are many activities around the church. We have a wonderful peal of 8 bells, hand bell ringers, Mothers' Union, Little Angels for mothers and toddlers, Lent lunches, and men's breakfast club to name but a few.

The main support organisation is the Friends. They have recently won a National Heritage Lottery Grant of £247k to repair the pinnacles and involve the town in Tower Stories. This is very exciting and will involve all parts of the community until 2025.

On another note, the Friends run excellent musical events and other entertainment to raise funds for the fabric.

The church hall is called The Grove and sits opposite the church. It is run independently and is a popular venue in Mere.

We have a paid administrator and a paid caretaker.

For more information, see:

www.stmichaels.org.uk

www.thetowerstories.co.uk

THE VICARAGE

The vicarage lies short walk from the church in Mere. It was built in the 1970s and has four bedrooms. It has a large garden and garage; it is on the edge of the town and not overlooked.



ST MARY THE VIRGIN, WEST KNOYLE



The Village

As one approaches the village of West Knoyle from the north, leaving the A303 behind, the road gives a breath-taking view of the Blackmore Vale stretching

twenty miles to the hills of Bulbarrow. The road then descends and at the foot stands the church of St Mary the Virgin, flag flying from the tower, looking out across to the village stretched beyond — an uplifting sight. Two and a half miles to the west stands the church at Mere.

The population of West Knoyle, some 150 souls, is much the same as it was at the close of the 12th Century, though the position of some of the houses may have moved further down the hill and away from the church.

The inhabitants range from elderly folk to families with very young children. In the centre of the village there is a village hall and social club which acts as our pub, being open twice a week. West Knoyle may be small but there is a variety of agricultural activity, two arable farms, a game farm, two livestock farms, a bison farm and much woodland. A fair proportion of the population make their living outside the village.

Service Pattern

We have one Church service on Sundays at 9:30am, giving the incumbent time to make it back to Mere for their 10:30am service. As much as possible, these services are Holy Communion based on the traditional form of worship, but once a month we hold a Lay (DIY) Matins, which the congregation rather enjoy.

There are about 40 members on the Electoral Roll though average attendances will be between 6 and 12 on a normal Sunday. This figure rises considerably for main festivals, particularly the Carol Service when the church is full (about 80).

Though they are always welcome, children mostly attend only on particular occasions and on these days, we like to serve refreshments from the back of the church.

The organ was recently refurbished, and we are lucky enough to have a regular organist and embryonic choir.

We regularly share services with Mere and have regularly held our joint Rogation Service in the woods at Bush Farm for the whole Benefice.

We are pleased to say that we have been able to meet our Share in full.

All denominations and those of other faiths are welcome in West Knoyle. It has been said that attending a service at St Mary's is like joining an extended family. To help us with the conduct of services we are lucky to have active and retired clergy. We enjoy their company and are delighted to hear that they enjoy coming to St Mary's.

The Community at West Knoyle

Being a small village and small congregation gives a strong community spirit, this manifests itself in our fundraising activities which are well supported by churchgoers and non-churchgoers alike and are often great fun. As a result of the parishioners' generosity and Grant giving bodies, the fabric of the church is in good order. Land to extend the churchyard was gifted a few years ago so we have plenty of grave space. It only remains to sort out the bells.

The children of the village attend primary school at Mere or Hindon, followed by Gillingham School which carries a very high OFSTED rating. There are several private schools nearby covering the whole school range.

West Knoyle is a happy little church and in common with many other churches we would love to see more people come to services regularly, although, over the last few years, this has been happening.

How to attract the younger generation is a constant source of discussion! Keeping the church open, welcoming and available to all for whenever they need it, is a goal to which we aspire.



Thank you for your interest in our benefice!

We pray for God's guidance as you consider his will for your ministry. For further information, please contact:

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