

CHURCH OF
St Michael
THE ARCHANGEL IN MERE



Benefice of Mere with West Knoyle



Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the post of parish priest for the Benefice of Mere with West Knoyle, part of the Ramsbury area of the Diocese of Salisbury. This post is a super opportunity for pastoral care and outreach in one of the most beautiful parts of Wiltshire.

The ancient see of Ramsbury, covering much of that county, is rich in spiritual heritage, from the cathedral city of Salisbury and the valleys of its five rivers, up to the Marlborough Downs. God is in this place – even though many know it not – and it offers an enriching context for ministry and mission today.

I am looking for devoted and visionary clergy, who can inspire and guide our communities in making Jesus known – which is 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. Because of this, the church must also change in order to grow, renewing its traditions for the contemporary situation.

These are, then, times of transition for the village churches of Wiltshire, which I sometimes liken to the oak trees of the Savernake Forest near my home, and which gradually join their root systems to survive individually. Churches must likewise learn how to collaborate ‘beneath the soil’ to flourish above ground in their own particular setting.

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 may the Lord guide you into his will for your future.

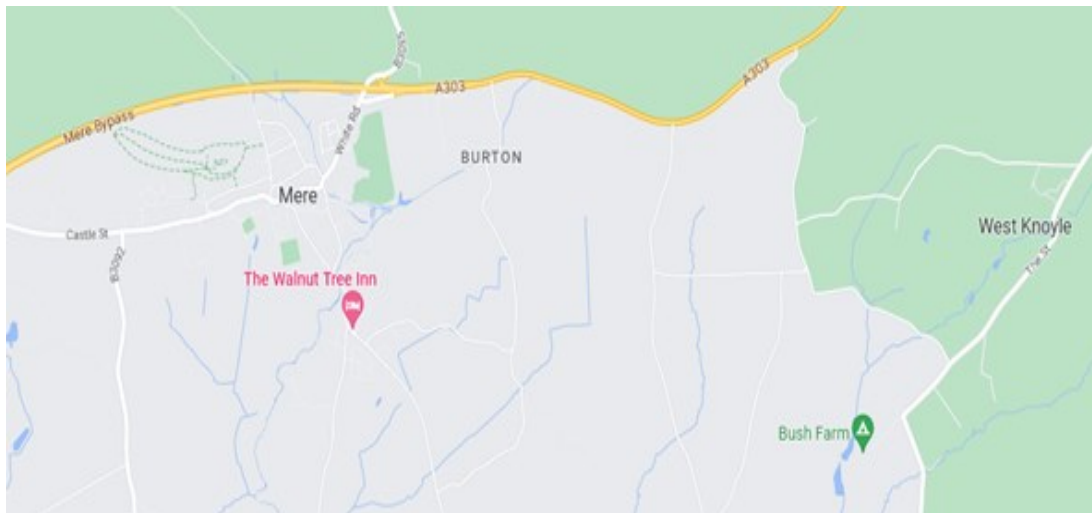
Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Andrew Ramsbury". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Who we are.....	5
What we value about our church.....	5
The future.....	5
Challenges.....	6
The role.....	6
Our new minister.....	7
St Michael the Archangel, Mere.....	8
Organisation, Finance, Safeguarding.....	17
The Vicarage.....	18
St Mary the Virgin, West Knoyle.....	19

Introduction



This profile gives an overview of the Benefice of Mere with West Knoye. Mere is located within South West Wiltshire close to the border of Dorset to the South and to the West, Somerset and West Knoye is a small village about 2.5 miles east of Mere.

Nearby are located the National Trust property, Stourhead; Old Wardour Castle and to the North, Longleat House. All of which attract many visitors.

It is a largely rural area, but growing, with new builds recently erected, with more planned, and has a current combined population of approx. 3500. The A303, a traditional route to the West Country, passes nearby. The area is served by good rail links to London and Exeter from Gillingham and to London, Bath and Bristol from Warminster. There are primary schools in Mere, Zeals and Kilmington; secondary schools in Gillingham and Warminster and there are public schools in the area.

The churches are now ready for effective clerical leadership to help us increase our congregation and wider church community. This, we believe, is both an opportunity and a challenge for the future. The successful candidate will find a supportive, engaged and confident church community keen to embrace and encourage new initiatives and direction, underpinned by dedication to follow God's purpose for the church in the community.

The lay leadership has shown tremendous strength and faith over recent years. This has been very important in making us resilient to changing circumstances. The strength of love for our churches is clear. During the COVID lockdown St Michael's church was one of the hubs for the local Foodbank and online services were initiated for the first time.

Who we are as a Benefice

The PCCs have considered what we value in our churches, what are some of our challenges and how we would like to see our Benefice develop in the future. We look forward to discussing these ideas with our new incumbent.

What we value about our churches

- **Faith** - the deep underlying faith of the lay leaders and congregation that have been essential to the life of the church
- **Presence** - the continued presence of worship in the local community
- **Focal point** - the churches are a major focal point in the community
- **Welcome** - the welcoming, friendly and peaceful approach of the church and congregation
- **Openness** - to new ways of working
- **Worship** - a variety of church services from BCP and Common Worship Communion services, and lay-led services.
- **Financial stability** - Until 2021 the church has always met the parish share and always plans to do so, both through committed giving and fund raising (recent difficulties are not in any way typical).

The future

The PCCs wishes to see:

- **Thriving churches**
 - Church for all ages, especially developing our youth and family offerings and finding ways to engage with the younger generation, together with flexible thinking about service patterns
 - A diverse pattern of services, respecting both the existing provision and the needs of the wider community
- **Pastoral care**
 - Increased support for all ages in our community with a focus on alleviating loneliness and poverty
- **Mission and outreach**
 - Increased liaison with local schools
 - Increased outreach to the local community

Challenges

In working towards the future the PCCs have identified some challenges that we would seek to overcome with our new incumbent

- **Worship** - the tension between those who seek change to worship patterns and music, and those who seek to retain current worship patterns
- **Governance** - we aim to steer the churches in a direction that enables it to succeed in its mission and manage its risks
- **Culture change** - moving from an inward facing culture to an outward mission-orientated culture which focuses on improved engagement with the local community .
- **Community engagement** - outreach to the wider community, especially around the new housing developments and amongst those living in the historically high proportion of local authority housing in Mere and West Knoyle. The benefice is a rural and peaceful environment but there are pockets of social deprivation

The role

In recent months there has been a steady increase and vitality in the congregation and the PCCs would like to build on this and work with a new incumbent to follow God's will and increase the Christian life of this beautiful area.

Discussions have led us to identify that the key areas of focus for our new incumbent will be:

- To rejuvenate the Christian life of the church by
 - providing a sustained, committed and consistent church service pattern
- Engage, support and improve the range of church-based activities
- To provide much needed pastoral support in the community, especially the elderly and vulnerable
- To engage with the local community through varied approaches, focusing on the schools and community groups
- Be a visible community presence

We want the church to be an integral part of the community for all ages and backgrounds.

Our new minister

We seek a vicar who will:



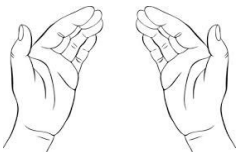
Teach and lead

Someone who walks with us and shares our spiritual journey, teaching and developing us through sermons, small groups and bible studies



Engage with our community

Someone who will bring a sense of mission to our community and schools, and who is as comfortable engaging with people in the local pub and local events as they are in church



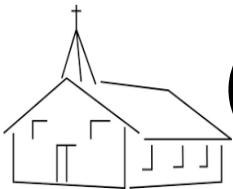
Develop Pastoral Care

Someone who will encourage lay people to offer pastoral care both to church and non-church parishioners, especially for the retired and vulnerable in the community



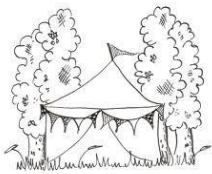
Engage with young people & families

Someone who has a real love of engaging with families and a proven record of developing youth and family outreach



Develop and grow the church

Someone with the enthusiasm to develop the church, supported by a dedicated core group of volunteers who are eager to see the church grow



Support a wide range of church activities

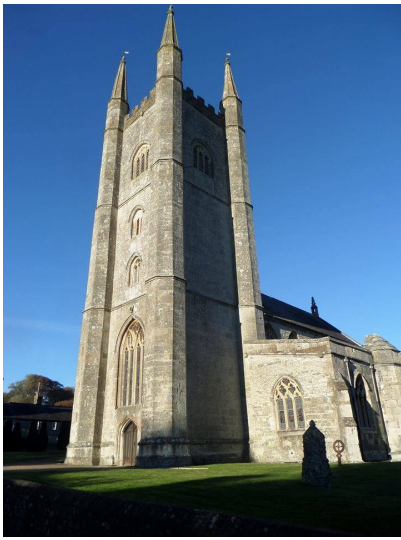
Engage and support the wide range of church-based activities e.g. choir, Mothers' Union, bell-ringers, hand-bell ringers and uniformed groups



Support and encourage the volunteers

Someone who will appreciate and encourage the volunteers

St Michael the Archangel, Mere



St Michael's is the largest church in Mere.

Outlying communities use the town for its services and cultural activities and as a focus for trade. As a larger business community it embodies agricultural and countryside workers, their families, farmers and a significant retired community as well as people commuting to the surrounding areas for employment. Notable employers include the RNAS Yeovilton, and the Royal Artillery section of the British Army based at Larkhill. As a consequence, Remembrance Day plays a significant role in the town.

There have been several new housing developments in the last fifteen years and a further development, of 230 properties, is nearing completion on the southern edge of the town. Local employers include Yapps (who are the UK's leading importer of French regional wines and supply many of the best restaurants in the UK), Hillbrush (who are the UK's largest manufacturer of brushware and hygienic cleaning tools and, significantly, hold a Royal Warrant) and Charles Farris (candlemakers and the foremost marketeer of church supplies, also Royal Warrant holders).

History of the church

There are records of a church on this spot in 1091 and rough masonry on the inner wall of the tower is probably from this 11C building. In 1220 the Dean of Salisbury visited and found an incomplete building with three altars, a tower and bells but no roof. In the 15C the nave arcades were added along with a clerestory on the south side and blind windows on the north and the nave itself was rebuilt to its present height. Further works were done in the 18C and then in the 1850s there were major works, previously plastered and painted walls were altered to expose rough stonework. The pews were carved locally in 1640 and reduced to under 3' in the 1850s and the rood screen dates from the 15C. The chancel contains, on the south side, original 15C stalls with misericords and, south of the altar, a 13C piscina. The south chantry, St Matthew's Chapel, was founded in 1325 by John of Mere and passed, in time, to Roger Bettesthorpe who created a memorial, in brass, of Sir John Bettesthorpe. Within the stained glass windows can be found top lights showing 3 saints and a Pope dated to 1325-30.

History of the church contd.....

The North Chapel is known as the Still Chapel, however it is likely that in the 15C this may have been a chantry for the Stourton family, owners of Stourhead. The font is 15C, set on a Purbeck marble 19C base near to a 13C piscina. To the right of the North Door is a rare example of the Royal Arms of James 2. Outside, above the 14C porch is a niche containing a statue of St Michael the Archangel defeating a serpent with two heads. The tower is 125ft high, originally 13C but part of the general rebuild in the 15C. It is in 3 stages with moulded plinth, 2 string courses, octagonal buttresses to prominent pinnacles, and an embattled parapet; the clock is 18C and there are eight bells, the oldest from 1460. The pinnacles have cruciform finials into which are inserted weather-vanes dating from the 19th century. The church is mentioned by Pevsner and also by Simon Jenkins in his book 'England's Thousand Best Churches'

Further information about St Michael's and the town of Mere can be found at Mere Library [Library locations and opening times | Wiltshire Council](#) and Mere Museum [Home - Mere Museum](#)

Worship at St Michael's

The table below shows the current range of services at the church.

Sundays	Services
1	8 am BCP Communion 10:30 am Morning Worship/Family Service
2	8 am BCP Communion 10:30 am Parish Communion
3	8 am BCP Communion 10:30 am Parish Communion
4	8 am BCP Communion 10:30 am Parish Communion
5	8 am BCP Communion 10:30 am Matins

Mere Church Sharing

With the closure of the Roman Catholic Church in Mere the RC congregation have made an approach to seek out the possibility of holding RC services in St Michael's. Since the closure the church have hosted a number of RC funerals.

We are currently at the stage of the final negotiations with the RC Community in order for this to go ahead.

Attendances at St Michael's are indicated in the table below. Eight or nine years ago the average attendance was 70-80.

Average Attendance at the 10:30 am service			
Year		2021	2022
		40	60

Leadership in the Vacancy

A number of ministers, mainly retired, have led services during the vacancy. Since July we have been fortunate to have received assistance on two Sundays each month from Rev.d Canon Simon Evans. We are also fortunate to have two licensed lay ministers, who have presided at Morning Worship and Matins. Additionally we have received support from a retired minister.

Celebration Services

Christian festivals and other events are celebrated throughout the year.

Easter

Palm Sunday is celebrated and palm crosses are distributed. An Ash Wednesday service takes place and on Maundy Thursday a Communion service. Stations of the Cross also takes place during the celebration period. On Good Friday a service is held at the Clock Tower in the centre of the town followed by a Walk of Witness up a local landmark, Castle Hill, with the cross being carried by a team of strong people.

In 2020/21 the Priest in Charge walked round the streets of Mere with the cross and stopped off at the homes of parishioners who read bible passages. This was then uploaded to Youtube.

Average attendance at the Easter Sunday services 2021/2022 was 140

Ascension Day - hymns are sung from the tower at 7:00 am followed by a service in the church.

Harvest

The annual Harvest Festival, followed by a harvest lunch in the Grove Building, was restarted in 2022. During the Harvest Service members of the congregation are encouraged to bring offerings of non-perishable food for the local Foodbank. The church is expertly decorated by the small team of flower arrangers .

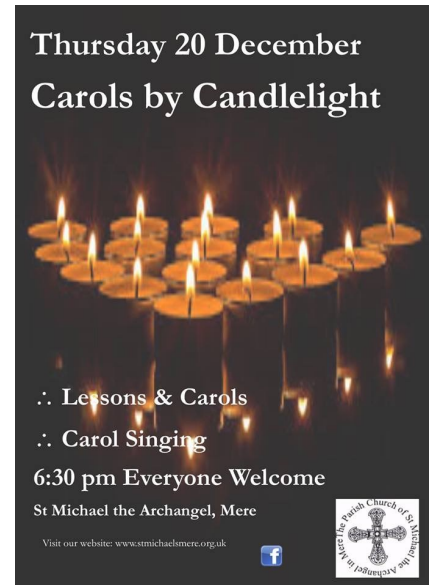
This year we have gone one step further and for Outreach a collection of fresh produce outside a local shop took place as did an auction of fresh produce after the service.



Remembrance

The Remembrance Service, held at the clock-tower, is a well respected event attended by members of the Royal British Legion, members of the local Scout & Guide Movements and members of the Town Council. Hymns are sung followed by the 2 minute silence at 11.00 am.

The main service then continues in the church when the names of all The Fallen from Mere are read out. The congregation frequently exceeds 200.



Christmas

Christmas services bring in the largest attendance of the church year. A Christmas tree is erected and the church is decorated magnificently, with the pillars adorned with greenery and candles.

A service of Lessons & Carols brings in many who probably only worship once a year. Mince pies and mulled wine follow the Carols by Candlelight service which is a real community event. A Christingle Service attended by many children from the local school is a delight to see.

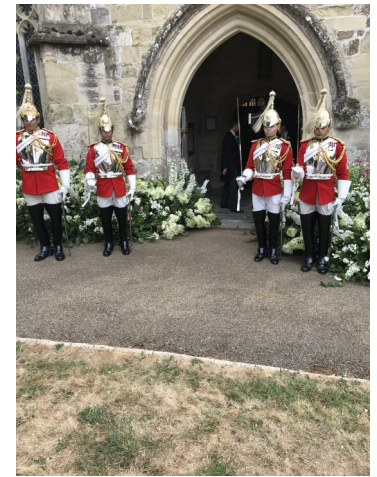
Carols are sung at the clock tower in the town centre and a crib service is held later in the church on Christmas Eve.

Baptisms, Weddings and Funerals

The church is a popular location for weddings with many family members returning home to be married. Owing to its proximity to military locations there have been some splendid weddings held at St Michael's, involving tractors especially.

The attached table shows the baptisms, weddings and funerals that have taken place since the Covid-19 lockdown.

Year	Weddings	Funerals	Baptisms
2021	6	22	1
2022	2	15	8



Church Maintenance

With the completion of the internal works in the church which amounted to: installation of toilets and servery, improved access via the North Door (main entrance), ramps to facilitate the movement of wheelchairs and buggies the next round of seeking funding for important maintenance is beginning.

Initially, this involves repair to the pinnacles and then following up on the Climate Action Plan with the installation of solar panels, lighting and audio upgrade, conversion of flood lights to LED, pew heating and continuing to rewild part of the churchyard.

Activities

Fete

The fete is a well-known yearly date in the church's calendar, taking place usually in June and held in the Church and Churchyard. Stalls include, among many others: plant sales, bric-a-brac, bottle tombola, coconut shy, face painting, raffle. Additionally, in liaison with a cancer charity, there has been a Teddy Parachute Jump from the top of the church tower. Cream teas are provided in the Grove Building.



Flower and Music Festival

The inaugural Flower & Music Festival took place in 2017, proving to be an extremely successful event. Local businesses and organisations were asked to provide a flower display encapsulating the nature of their occupation. The next festival is scheduled for 2024.

Heritage



A small team of people interested in the heritage of the church, with the assistance of the Heritage Open Day team, staged a weekend showcasing the life of the church. Tower tours were organised as well as tours of the churchyard and inside the church. Records of interest to local historians, such as births, deaths and marriages were collected from the Archive at Chippenham and made available to view inside the church.

Preparations are underway to participate in the 2023 Heritage Weekend. Of particular note is a recently conserved medieval wall paintings

Music

St Michael's is fortunate to have two organs, a traditional pipe organ and a digital organ. Longer term plans include regular yearly musical events. The digital organ is played at some main Sunday services, and at weddings and funerals but due to the lack of a permanent organist a digital 'hymn machine' has been purchased and will be used when an organist is not available. There is a small mixed-voice robed choir that sings at all main services and is supplemented by other singers for special occasions. Currently, choir practices are at 5:00 pm on Thursdays in the church. The pipe organ is regularly checked and tuned and is an excellent example of this type of organ.

Outreach Activities

In 2022 increased Outreach has been developed by our Churchwarden, with the following initiatives:

- ◇ Great Mere Bake Off - With a significant number of local entries this was a wonderful enterprise. The winner was an Eton Mess themed cake
- ◇ Knitted Christmas Angels - Over 450 have been knitted to be distributed around the town and blessed on Christmas Eve. Even some sent from Yorkshire & Ireland!
- ◇ Morning drives with parishioners visiting other churches and looking at options that could be done at St Michael's, including chatting and coffee
- ◇ Little Angels - A weekly toddler group in the Grove Building. Singing, crafts and lots of playing
- ◇ House group meeting weekly
- ◇ Harvest, collecting outside the Co-op and talking with local community
- ◇ Blankets, gathered over the summer to be washed and repaired ready to be distributed in the cold weather
- ◇ Invitation cards printed and handed out in the community
- ◇ Congregation Christmas Lunch at a local hostelry
- ◇ Fresh coffee after services



Church Groups

- ◇ **Friends of St Michael's** - The Friends raise funds to preserve and improve the building and furnishings of our ancient parish church . They raised the significant costs for the upgrading of the church in 2021. At present they are working hard to raise the funds to repair the tower pinnacles.
- ◇ **The Grove Building** - Built in 1891 across Church Street from St Michael's, the Grove Building now provides modern and comfortable meeting rooms for the church and many other community groups. It has a large main hall, a small hall and a fully-equipped kitchen, plus male and female toilets. It also provides disabled access and Wi-fi.
- ◇ **Mothers' Union** - There has been an active branch of the MU based at St Michael's Church for over a hundred years and though membership is now in the 20s, it has lively and well-attended monthly meetings. It provides active support for most church events. The MU holds a very popular Noonday Carol Service + lunch in mid December each year, and last Christmas, provided home-delivered Christmas Day meals and teas to many isolated people in the community.
- ◇ **Churches Together in Mere & District** - comprises the three Anglican Churches in Mere, West Knoyle and Maiden Bradley and the four Anglican Churches in Upper Stour benefice, together with Mere United Reformed Church. CTMD has been a positive force in the community for many years. It organises hustings at general elections; initiated the Sure Start programme (subsequently taken over by the School); has run very popular Lent Lunches for over 30 years; holds a well-attended annual Walk of Witness up Castle Hill each Good Friday; sings carols in Mere Square on Christmas Eve; ran Messy Church for some time and runs Open the Book at Mere School; provided meals for the lonely and left-out on Christmas Day for several years; held a lively One World Fair for over 10 years; supports Fair Trade; has held quiet days and ecumenical Lent study groups. Joint services are held four or five times a year, including Taize-style services, and services for Christian Aid week, Remembrance Sunday and Mere Literary Festival, as well as daily meetings for prayer and fellowship in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.
- ◇ **Handbell ringers** - Mere Melodies was started in 1999 by a small group of people ringing tunes on a set of Handbells found hanging in St Michael's Church tower. The name was decided because with only 12 bells they could only ring simple tunes. The bells were also not standard pitch. With the help of a grant from S.W.A.G. we were able to purchase a full 2 octave set of Malmark Bells.

Local Schools

The local schools are of a high standard with all of the schools having 'Good' Ofsted reports.

Mere School is a single form entry primary school and feeder primary for Gillingham School in Dorset. Currently there is one church representation on the school governors committee. Engagement between the church and school is limited, although Open the Book is very well received by staff and pupils

Motcombe CE Primary School is located just over the border in Dorset, close to Shaftesbury

Whitesheet C of E Primary Academy can be found in Zeals, a 7 minute drive from the church

Gillingham School has a large catchment area, both in Dorset & Wiltshire, for secondary education.

Several Private Schools can also be found nearby.

We hope the new minister will take the opportunity to re-establish a close bond between Mere school and the church. In addition to the incumbent, there are places on the Governing Board for Foundation Governors. As an ex-officio Governor, the PCC sees it as a key priority that our new incumbent builds up the work with our schools .

Transport Links

The nearest railway station to Mere is Gillingham (Dorset) - 4 miles. Managed by South Western Railway hourly services operate between London Waterloo and Exeter St Davids.

Warminster Railway station - 10 miles. Operated by GWR with regular services to Bristol, Cardiff, Southampton and Portsmouth.

Buses—Mere is fortunate to be serviced by a few different public transport options each week.

Mere & District Link Scheme volunteers help people in Mere and surrounding villages to get to their medical appointments, shops and social events. The Link Scheme has been the sole beneficiary of the Mere Literary Festival, now in its 24th year.

Organisation, Finance and Safeguarding

Parochial Church Council

St Michael's has an active and hard-working PCC of sixteen members chaired during the vacancy by the Lay Vice Chair or churchwardens. Members include three members of the Deanery Synod and two Licensed Lay ministers. During the vacancy it has been meeting regularly and is supported by a voluntary Parish Administrator. It tries to meet its financial obligations to the diocese and maintains a regular programme of repair to the church fabric. Two churchwardens are in place along with a Treasurer and Secretary

Finance

In line with other Anglican parishes, attendance and giving has fallen over the last 3 years due to the pandemic.

St Michael's has, for several years, found it a challenge to meet its costs and has had to draw on its dwindling reserve funds. However, recently, people have been returning to church and have been starting or renewing their Planned Giving. Our congregation, along with irregular or non-churchgoers are as generous as they can be. The Fete and other fund-raising activities boost our income. Repair costs are always significant in a listed building and the recent discovery of woodworm and death watch beetle in the carved wooden angels high in the main body of the church was a large setback to our finances. The cost was met with our own funds together with generous donations from some parishioners.

Safeguarding

St Michael's has an appointed Safeguarding Officer and full training has been given to relevant people.

Grove Building

We are fortunate to have an office in the Grove Building for the Church Administration.

The Vicarage

The Vicarage is a four-bedroom detached property close to the church in Mere with a family bathroom, a study, living room, dining room, kitchen, utility room and toilet, and a double garage. There is a large garden.



Website

www.stmichaelsmere.org.uk

Facebook

@MereStMichaelschurch

Benefice Summary

Church: St Michael the Archangel, Mere;

PCC 1

Churchwardens: 2

Licensed Lay Ministers: 2

Pastoral Assistants: 7

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 turns a corner to give a breathtaking view of the Blackmore Vale stretching twenty miles to the hills of Bulbarrow. The road then descends and there 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. Three miles to the west stands the church of 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 ages of the inhabitants range from elderly to some families with very young children. In the centre of the village there is a village hall and social club which acts as our only 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.

Services

We have one Church service on Sundays at 9:30 am: this gives the incumbent time to make it back to Mere for 10:30 am. As much as possible, these services are Holy Communion based on the traditional form of worship, but certainly once a month we hold a Lay (DIY) matins which the congregation rather enjoy. There are about 40 members on the Electoral Roll though averages 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 usually hold our Rogation Service in the woods at Bush Farm for the whole Benefice.

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 in that the incumbent has the assistance of active and retired clergy, we enjoy their company and are always 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 can often be great fun. As a result of the parishioner's great 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, though, to be fair, over the last few years this has been happening. How we can 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 worthy goal to which we aspire.