



Bridgnorth & Morville Parishes TEAM MINISTRY

Benefice Profile



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THE PROFILE

This profile describes the Bridgnorth and Morville Benefice comprising the following parishes:

THE TOWN PARISH:

1. St Mary Magdalene with St Leonard's
St Leonard's Hall Church
St James Hall Church

THE VILLAGE PARISHES:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------|
| 2. St Calixtus, Astley Abbots | 6. St Gregory the Great Morville |) |
| 3. St Peter and St Paul Tasley | 7. Aston Eyre |) The |
| | 8. St Mary the Virgin, Acton Round |) Morville |
| 4. St Nicholas, Oldbury | 9. St Peter's, Monkhopton |) Group |
| 5. St Mary Magdalene Quatford | with St Michael's Upton Cressett |) |



Welcome from the Archdeacon of Ludlow

Thank you for downloading and reading this profile – we’re delighted that you have. The words you will read and the pictures you see capture the heart of this Team of nine parishes, centred around the market town of Bridgnorth in the northeast of our diocese. The profile is the fruit of much prayer and hard work, and we hope that, as you prayerfully read it, you will sense whether God is calling you to come and serve Christ here among us. Please know that we are praying for you as you read it.

Seeing the words “Priest-in-Charge” in a job title inevitably raises the question of whether there is likely to be pastoral re-organisation. In this case, the right of presentation was suspended because of the diocese’s proposal to dispose of the very large Georgian Rectory and purchase a more suitable property for 21st century ministry life. That process is now complete, and so the expectation is that we shall consult on lifting the suspension sooner rather than later.



The Ven. Fiona Gibson, Archdeacon of Ludlow



Section One: The Priest-in-Charge We Need

The Benefice of Bridgnorth and Morville has been blessed to have a stable and collaborative team working across nine parishes. Until late 2022 the benefice team comprised a team rector and vicar, a curate, an inter-generational missionary and youth supporter, a non-stipendiary vicar, a Reader who is commissioned as an Anna Chaplain and a team administrator. With various team members being called to pastures new, we currently only have a Reader and team administrator. However, we are extremely fortunate to have a group of three retired clergy serving as Honorary Assistant Ministers for St Mary's and the benefice as a whole, to cover this vacancy period. With God's help we see this situation as an exciting opportunity for development and change and are looking for our new priest-in-charge to help further guide us.

In addition to a new priest-in-charge, our expectation is that we will also be seeking a team vicar or equivalent and, since St Mary's has a long history as a training parish, a curate. Our new incumbent, with the bishop, will lead the recruitment of these two stipendiary posts and together with the DDVO they will lead the discernment process for a future curate. He or she will communicate vision, excitement and energy to our whole team, both ordained and lay.



Holy Spirit Dove

Our challenges and goals

Our benefice comprises the thriving market town parish of Bridgnorth surrounded by eight rural village parishes. Like many rural areas, we recognise that our congregations are becoming smaller and older and that the world around us is changing. We know that many townspeople in particular see the church as being too remote, traditional, formal and ceremonial.

Therefore, we seek to be a church that grows organically from within our thriving community, with a willingness to live in faith, and to take risks, recognising that this needs a willingness to make mistakes as well as celebrate success. We believe this can be achieved by our parishes working even closer together with St Mary's at the heart, being developed as the Hub for the benefice, with its two Hall Churches, St Leonard's and St James, being centres for the expansion of our town congregation. Alongside the hub, our village churches may build strength from mutual support while continuing to serve their village communities with whom they have close links.

We also see that our patterns of worship must change and adapt as we seek to bring new members into our congregations. We already had a pattern of lay-led services before the vacancy and this has developed further during it. We know that this is part of the path to the future. We also seek opportunities for more modern ways to worship while retaining our traditions. We are thankful to God for all that has gone before, and for the recent developments and opportunities that we see.

Priest-in-Charge Role

We would like the next Priest-in-Charge to be a prayerful person of integrity with emotional as well as intellectual intelligence, who is committed to God and faithful to scripture and the gospel message embodied in the life and teachings of Jesus. They will be:

- ✚ an inspiring and joyful leader in faith and worship, a leader who is creative and enthusiastic
- ✚ friendly and welcoming, a good communicator and willing to go out and meet people throughout the benefice
- ✚ a good team player as well as team builder who can build relationships and be a good and sensitive listener able to resolve differences of opinion as we move forward
- ✚ prepared to try new initiatives to engage with new groups of all ages
- ✚ willing to fully participate in and encourage the full life of the town and village communities
- ✚ able to encourage and build on existing ecumenical links within the area
- ✚ someone who has focus and doesn't mind rolling up their sleeves and getting stuck in with an "all things are possible with God" attitude



St Mary's Churchyard

We would like our future Priest-in-Charge to:

- ✚ build, lead, encourage and motivate the team of both ordained and lay members, to deliver the mission of the benefice.
- ✚ encourage varied patterns of worship and pastoral care throughout the benefice.
- ✚ bring innovative, fresh and challenging ideas in all aspects of the ministry.
- ✚ encourage, develop and utilise sensitively the work of our valued lay members.
- ✚ ensure finances across the benefice are well managed and controlled working with churchwardens and treasurers.
- ✚ actively promote the use of the benefice churches for community events and encourage residents to see the church as the centre and heart of the community.
- ✚ participate in the life of the church schools in the Benefice and encourage links between the Church and the School.
- ✚ encourage a variety of music in church both for our services and as entertainment for the community around us.



Section Two: What We Have to Offer

The Benefice of Bridgnorth and Morville is in south-east Shropshire between the West Midlands conurbation and the Welsh borders. Its nine parishes span both town and country, lying within the beautiful countryside of the Severn Valley and along the banks of the River Severn. Tourism and heritage are important to the area with the market town of Bridgnorth, in particular, attracting many tourists to its market and independent shops, the Severn Valley Railway and visitors to the Thomas Telford designed St Mary's church.

During the vacancy, all nine parish communities have continued to meet and pray, maintaining the individual lives of their churches and their links with the community. In part, this has been with the help of our retired clergy and the committed teams of volunteers in each parish.

Our Anna Chaplain continues her work with the elderly with enthusiasm and drive. She is a valued team member who is developing means of reaching and supporting older members of the community in a variety of ways, wherever they live, including nursing and retirement homes.

The voluntary members of our team in each of the parishes work well together. Our delightful toddler group at St Mary's is growing and some village parishes together with St Leonard's Hall Church hold regular family services.

The village churches have well established contact with their communities through their programmes of social and cultural events and St Mary's maintains its contact with town charities and the food bank. Music is an important and growing feature of life at St Mary's with concerts and the English Haydn Festival of national importance.

We have contact with the other denominations in the town and hold a monthly lunch with congregants of the other churches.

Our churches are well maintained and our finances are stable, though there are concerns for 2023/24 in terms of heating costs and the pressures on giving. Our main challenges are the increasing age and declining numbers of our congregations – with exceptions at those parishes with active family services.

These are the foundations on which a new priest-in-charge can build for the future.



Our Vision Statement:

We seek to be a Christ-centred community founded on prayer, developing relationships with those in the community, and drawing them to Christ and a life of discipleship. We seek to build relationships with each other and the community. To be a church that grows organically from within the community, with a willingness to live in faith, and to take risks, recognising that this needs a willingness to make mistakes as well as celebrate success. As we work together to recognize, encourage, and develop the gifts God has given, we want to enable every member of the Bridgnorth and Morville Team to be involved in mission and ministry.

In particular, in ten years' time we would want to see:

- ✚ A growing congregation filling all our buildings – including the two hall churches.
- ✚ A congregation alive with families, young people and adults of all ages
- ✚ Church Schools flourishing
- ✚ A bustling Sunday School and growing youth group.
- ✚ The congregation learning to minister and take on leadership
- ✚ A growing preaching team ready to help support and increase the ministry for the villages
- ✚ Actively involvement in taking on the challenges of a continually changing world in the town and villages.
- ✚ Clergy playing an active role in the local community

What We Need to Do

- ✚ Build on and explore patterns of worship to help our congregations move closer to God and build a deeper understanding of our mission
- ✚ Retain traditions valued in our parishes, but we also want to include and develop more modern forms of worship including family, lay-led, mid-week and other services.
- ✚ Develop delivery of our Alpha Course to clearly and engagingly present the gospel throughout all the parishes. In addition, we want to train members of our congregations so that we can expand and develop delivery of our lay-led ministry.
- ✚ Move our churches further into their local communities spreading the gospel of Jesus as we go.
- ✚ We need to extend our work within schools including Open the Book, as well as with the Anchored Project involving Bridgnorth Youth and Schools Project and The Bridge Youth Centre.
- ✚ Guided by the Holy Spirit, develop the work of our Joint Council as a Team Hub so that parishes can better communicate and work with each other. In addition, under the umbrella of the Joint Council, we want to re-establish the Local Ministry Development Group to focus and further develop it's community work throughout the benefice.
- ✚ Safeguarding is a vital component in all we do and we will continue our commitment to adherence of safeguarding processes and procedures.

For Our Priest-in-Charge

The house for our new minister is in Bridgnorth, within 15 minutes' walk of both St Mary's and St Leonard's Hall Church and within easy driving distance of the other churches in the Team. The property has a living room, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room, utility room, study (with separate access), conservatory, and a toilet downstairs and four bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. There is off-street parking at the front of the house, a detached double garage to the rear of the property, and good-sized but easy to maintain gardens to front and back.





Section Three: About the Benefice

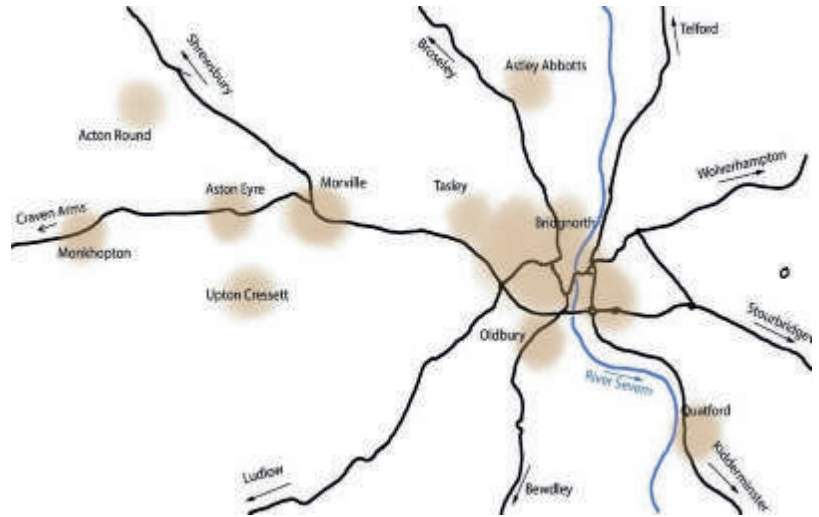
The benefice of Bridgnorth and Morville Parishes Team Ministry is a large one with nine parishes. St Mary Magdalene with St Leonard's, which is the largest, is a town parish. The remaining eight are village parishes each with a clear local identity. A Joint Council brings together representatives of all the PCCs to discuss issues common to the parishes and the benefice as a whole. St Mary's has a civic role in the town and the village churches have strong links to the life of their communities.

The parish of St Mary Magdalene with St Leonard's is based in the market town of Bridgnorth, St Peter and St Paul Tasley and St Calixtus Astley Abbots are to the north, St Nicholas Oldbury is to the south with St Mary Magdalene Quatford (which is the only Parish to the east of the River Severn) and the rural parishes of St Gregory the Great Morville, St Mary Acton Round, Aston Eyre, and St Peter Monkhopton with St Michael Upton Cressett to the west.

Bridgnorth is a market town providing an attractive centre for the surrounding rural areas and farming communities as well as being a dormitory town for the Wolverhampton and Telford conurbations. Lying on the River Severn to the east of the Shropshire Hills Natural Landscape (an area of outstanding national beauty) the town has been an important centre for many centuries reflected in the numerous historic streets and buildings. It offers an appealing place to live and work.

In Bridgnorth, two hall churches form part of the parish of St Mary Magdalene with St Leonard's. The St Leonard's church building along with that of St Michael's Upton Cressett are in the care of the Churches Conservation Trust.

The area is a popular centre for tourism and Bridgnorth itself hosts an inland funicular Cliff Railway and the northern terminus for the Severn Valley Railway. Bridgnorth was the first town in Shropshire to achieve Fair Trade status. The town is physically divided by the river Severn into two parts known as High Town and Low Town with the St Mary Magdalene Parish Church situated on the sandstone outcrop of High Town. The town has many clubs and associations for all ages including sports clubs, musical and theatre groups, Guides, Scouts, youth groups, Rotary, U3A and WI. The Severn Valley Railway brings many tourists to the town.



The population of the Benefice is approximately 15,000. The parish of Bridgnorth together with that of Tasley account for 90% of the benefice population. The population is slightly older and better off than the region as a whole. Throughout the area there is a fair social mix with some council as well as a variety of privately owned properties. There has been an expansion in housing provision, particularly in Tasley parish, and currently much more is proposed. There have also been smaller scale developments in several of the rural villages. None of these villages has a population above 500 and most are half or less than that. Additionally, there are five park home developments, one in Bridgnorth and four in Quatford.

Local employment opportunities are limited and a large proportion of the working population commute to larger centres including Wolverhampton (18 miles) and Telford (12 miles). The unemployment rate is significantly below the regional average, as is the presence of ethnic minorities. The area is dependent on bus services for public transport but these are limited.

There are five primary schools: County, Roman Catholic, C of E Aided and C of E Controlled and one is a multi-academy trust. There are also several independent nurseries. There are two Secondary Schools of which one is a stand-alone academy and one is a local multi-academy trust. All the schools are rated Good by Ofsted.

The town has a community hospital, a medical practice and pharmacies. The hospital includes a minor injuries unit. Across the benefice there are four residential nursing homes and four residential retirement apartment blocks and a considerable amount of warden assisted housing around the town. Bridgnorth Library is also a community hub and tourist information centre.



Tasley Churchyard Survey

Care of the Creation is recognised as part of our Christian calling and this is encouraged through the A Rocha 'Eco Church' scheme. Five churches in the benefice (St Mary's Bridgnorth, Astley Abbots, Oldbury, Quatford & Tasley) have registered as Eco Churches. Led by Eco Groups and involving others both within and outside the church, St Mary's has a bronze award while Astley Abbots and Quatford have already gained a silver award.

Benefice Resources

The benefice has a Team Office with part time administrator, located in permanent office accommodation in St Leonard's Hall, equipped with a photocopier, IT with iKnow Church software providing web platform and calendar facility.

The benefice is governed through a Joint Council which is formed from the clergy team and representatives from the PCCs of each of the 9 churches. The Joint Council was established by a pastoral scheme that put in place the Team Ministry and provides support to the clergy

Each of the nine parishes in the benefice is responsible for its financial conduct and each one is supported by its own treasurer. The main areas of expenditure are building maintenance, the Parish offer to the diocese and the contribution to the centrally organised benefice team office. The team office deals with life event administration, printing, web site, the CrossLink newsletter and support to the clergy. There is a part time administrator with support from volunteers. The parishes manage their own fund raising and this has successfully enabled funding of their commitments including contributions to the team office costs. The team office finances are the responsibility of the Joint Council and are managed by its treasurer.

Benefice Communications

There is a benefice wide monthly magazine, Crosslink and for the four rural churches at Morville, a monthly newsletter distributed to all households in those parishes. The Team website provides a common communication route for the congregations as well as the public for example, looking for information on weddings and funerals. Individual churches also provide social media sites and their own web sites to assist communication at local level.



Section Four: About the Parishes

Worship and Prayer

Each parish has its own liturgical style, reflecting the congregation and the resources available to it. Most parishes' worship centres around Common Worship Holy Communion although a number find the familiarity of the Prayer Book is more helpful and tradition is valued. This applies, in particular, to the parishes of Acton Round, Monkhopton and to a lesser extent Aston Eyre and Quatford.

St Mary's Bridgnorth traditionally had three services each Sunday. Holy Communion was celebrated at 08.00 (BCP) and at 10.30 (Common Worship) with a weekly evensong. A robed choir traditionally led the Holy Communion worship with a congregation of about 30. The 08.00 service is temporarily discontinued for the period of the vacancy. There is also a weekly Wednesday service of Holy Communion with a congregation of 5 or 6. Before the pandemic there was also a choral evensong with a limited congregation but this has not re-started post-covid. St Mary's also participates with other churches in various interdenominational events such as the Easter sunrise service and a popular outdoor Christmas carol event. More informal services are held twice monthly at St Leonard's Hall Church, one of which is a lay led Family Service.



Tasley Environmental Service

Services at the village churches vary. Tasley has weekly services, including Holy Communion, and a more informal monthly All Age Worship service. The parish shares an organist and choir with Astley Abbots where services are held weekly including Holy Communion, a Family Service and Morning Prayer. Oldbury and Quatford each have Holy Communion services twice a month and share an organist and choir which is based at Quatford.

Services at Morville have been traditional and taken from the BCP although a more modern approach has recently been adopted for some services. The Songs of Praise hymn book is used. There are weekly services on all Sundays except for the 5th Sunday when no service is held. Before the vacancy, there were two Holy Communion services, one a traditional version and one a modern version. There are two Morning Prayer services which are modern. The bells are rung each Sunday by a keen team of bell ringers. Two services a month (Holy Communion and a Morning Prayer) are held at Aston Eyre. Holy Communion is held monthly at Acton Round and alternate monthly with Morning Prayer at Monkhopton which also has a teatime church.



Morville Bell Ringers

There are several bible study or home group meetings. Some meet regularly and some are formed for a limited duration, e.g., for Lent and Advent or for series such as Uncover John, Christianity Explored and The Bible Course. One group is based at St Leonard's HC, one at Astley Abbots and another is run by the Anna Chaplain.

At Aston Eyre, there are two services each month, Morning Prayer on the second Sunday, led by our very supportive Lay Reader, and Holy Communion, which is celebrated on the fourth Sunday. Services are also held on festivals and special occasions. The congregation adapts to different styles of worship. The core of faithful regular worshippers, (8-10) are joined by many others, more loosely affiliated to the Church, who attend in large numbers for special services. These include Palm Sunday when we celebrate the special festival of our Church, Easter and the evening services at Harvest and Christmas when drinks and refreshments are served.



Dedication Ceremony for Stephen Humpreys – Parishioner and Veteran of the Battle of Trafalgar

The parish of Acton Round has a very small congregation, The congregation consists of about 10% of a civil population of about 70. The church uses traditional forms of worship and usually has a service once a month, following the Book Of Common Prayer. Harvest Festival, Rogation Sunday, Easter, and Christmas are very well attended services.

PARISH	Resident Population	Typical HC Congregation No	Electoral roll 2023	Parish Offer 2023
St Mary Magdalene	11,222	30 - 35	98	£53000
St Leonard's HC	Inc	11 - 16		
St James HC	Inc			
Tasley	897	15	39	£12360
Astley Abbots	460	14	40	£11340
Oldbury	1,180	17	45	£8000
Quatford	216	12 - 15	36	£10000
Morville	430	15	22	£5000
Monkhopton	220	8	19	£1885
Aston Eyre	69	8	18	£3000
Acton Round	131	6	10	£2500

A few church members meet regularly for prayer. The ecumenical World Day of Prayer was hosted by St Mary's in 2022 and several people are on the committee with members from other denominations in the town. There is also a silent prayer group that aims to meet weekly every Friday. The Anna Chaplain also runs a quiet retreat day once a year.

A group recently participated in a week of guided prayer. There are also Occasional Ecumenical Vigils to pray for specific events in 2022 included COP26 and Ukraine.

Our parishes – particularly St Mary's - have small and increasingly older congregations.

Financially and in terms of the electoral roll, the benefice is dominated by St Mary's which we would like to develop as a "Hub" for learning mission and the development of community service and contact.

The Churches and the Community

In common with all other churches, the pandemic significantly affected the conduct of baptisms, weddings and funerals. During the past year these have moved more towards the normal procedure. Baptisms and weddings are preceded by appropriate preparations for those taking part and funerals are preceded by pastoral visits. Marriage preparation courses are offered before weddings.

PARISH	Baptisms 2023	Weddings 2023	Funerals 2023
St Mary Magdalene	6	6	17
St Leonards HC			
St James HC			
Tasley	2	1	7
Astley Abbots	1	1	1
Oldbury	1	1	5
Quatford	0	3	1
Morville	0	3	5
Monkhopton	0	0	0
Aston Eyre	0	0	0
Acton Round	0	0	0
2023 Total	11	14	29
2022 Total	39	18	43
2021 Total	18	9	36

Anna Chaplaincy

The Anna Chaplain was commissioned by the Bishop on 28th November 2021. This is especially valuable in addressing the needs of an ageing congregation and community, wherever they are on their journey of faith. Our Anna Chaplain offers a community approach to supporting older people, including before and after funerals and visiting our local care homes. We value and wish to see this as an expanded part of our continued ministry.

Ecumenical Relations

Within the town there are Roman Catholics, Baptists, Methodists and Evangelical churches. Relationships between ministers are good. There are ecumenical lunches during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and on Wednesdays in Lent, together with united services at various points in the year. In addition, a team of people from churches across the town are taking the Open the Book programmes to schools in the town. St Mary's Connect is a lunch club which meets monthly at a local pub and was set up by the Anna Chaplain; a group of between 12 and 20 people attend including some from the Methodist Church. It is open to those of any faith and no faith.

The Local Ministry Development Group

The Diocese of Hereford has a strategy for growth and development in which the development of local ministry is shared between ordained clergy and the laity. Bridgnorth had a local ministry development group but it has now dwindled with much of the work that it did continuing through the effort of committed individuals. We need to re-activate it and bring in members from other parishes under the umbrella of the Joint Council. It can be practically involved in various ways, including leading services in residential homes and pastoral care and church worship by reading lessons and leading intercessions. Through the group, we want to further extend a deep commitment to enrich and enmesh the life of church and community.

Bridgnorth Community Trust

This is the umbrella body for local initiatives undertaken by churches in the community. These include the Bridgnorth Youth and Schools Project, the Bridgnorth Food Bank and Together at Christmas, an initiative to bring together up to a hundred isolated or vulnerable people for a meal on Christmas Day. Bridgnorth Youth and Schools Project was established eleven years ago with ecumenical support and is funded by the churches of the town, the Diocese and individuals. It is the largest provider of youth services in the town, having a budget five times the size of the County provision. It runs the Bridge Youth Centre and has a widely respected outreach programme to primary and secondary schools. It has a specifically Christian ethos. Its work is overseen by the Bridgnorth Community Trust.



Harvest Festival – for
the Food Bank

Bridgnorth Food Bank

This plays a vital role in the provision of emergency food parcels and medium-term support for the residents of Bridgnorth and the surrounding area. Where necessary it is also able to provide basic essentials other than food, to help meet people's needs. The Food Bank is supported, amongst others, by all the churches in the town and there is growing cooperation between charities linked through their trustees to St Mary's.

Civic Contact

The Team Rector and Team Vicar between them were ex officio governors of the three church schools St. Mary's Bluecoat (VA) School, St. Leonard's CE Primary School and Morville CE Primary School which are our church schools. Relationships with head teachers are cordial and greatly valued in all schools.

An ecumenical team delivered 'Open the Book' assemblies once a week in these three primary schools which was much appreciated. A church service with school, usually once a term, is also held at the appropriate church. This activity is now much reduced and continues with a contribution by one of our retired clergy.

The team has been fully involved in the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) inspection preparations. Furthermore, the Oldbury Wells Secondary School and Castlefield's Primary School are part of a MAT (Multi-Academy Trust) which has minority articles within the Diocese of Hereford Education Trust. There has also been a good relationship with the Executive Headteacher as this developed.

The Team Rector has also served in the past as the Mayor's Chaplain in a private pastoral engagement with councillors and the Town Clerk. They also have civic involvement in ceremonies including Remembrance Sunday, town twinning ceremonies and switching on the town's Christmas lights. An Easter Sunrise Service takes place in Low Town and a Christmas Carol Service is held under the Town Hall.



Little stars at St Marys

Social Contact

One morning a week during term time St Marys hosts Little Stars. Currently, about 25 babies and toddlers (0-5yrs) come with their parents, grandparents, carers and childminders and the group has continued to grow post-pandemic. Weekly activities are planned termly by a group of parents and volunteers. The objective is to offer opportunities to develop the children's cognitive, physical and social skills as well as a bit of good old-fashioned messy play and crafts! There is also a Christian input.

St Mary's is also open for a Saturday morning café at which tea, coffee and cakes are offered by a team of volunteers to parishioners and visiting tourists. During the year various events are held in church including artwork exhibitions, a Lent public lectures series on the environment, an Easter egg hunt for the children in the adjoining Castle Gardens and various concerts. The church is always open during the day and attracts many casual visitor including during the annual Shropshire Historic Churches "Ride and Stride" in which all the Parishes take part.



Saturday Morning Café



Church Choir

Music in worship is an essential part of the liturgy at St Mary's where the choral tradition goes back over 150 years. Until Covid and then the vacancy, there has been a sung Eucharist and a Choral Evensong most Sundays with special choral services for Epiphany, Candlemas and the Patronal Festival. There is Choir Practice once a week and the choir is RSCM affiliated. Until covid there was training for RSCM awards. The choir has been badly hit by covid and the loss of team members who had close links with schools has meant that the previous cohort of young choristers is not being replaced, St Mary's Chamber Choir is 30 strong and attracts members, with an age range of 14 to 87, from throughout the benefice and holds two concerts a year at Christmas and Easter. Both the Choir and the Chamber Choir benefit from the presence of an excellent 'Father Willis' organ and Yamaha piano.

There has been a Concert series with professional artists at St Mary's from 1990 to the present. The four-day English Haydn Festival, with a professional orchestra and soloists, is an annual event that is well supported from all over Britain and abroad. Bridgnorth has a local Sinfonia and male and female choirs and an eclectic mix of other music genres is well represented. A programme of music in church is being developed as part of the effort to see the church building more widely used by our community.



Birmingham Bach Choir

The Hall Churches

In Bridgnorth we have two Hall Churches within the parish of St Mary's. From the start [St Leonard's Hall Church](#) was a well-used community asset. A play group has continued for many years and is joined by uniformed organisations such as guides and brownies and many other groups. In the early 2000s, there was a big effort to raise funds to improve the Hall Church. The facilities, especially the kitchen and toilets, were upgraded and storage space was provided for the many organisations using the hall. As well as the uniformed organisations, the space is used by a choir, a yoga class, a slimming class, Mencap and Alcoholics Anonymous to name just a few. Special effort was made to ensure accessibility.

The hall is also used as a Polling station and can be hired for birthday parties. The Team Administrator works out of an office in the building which makes St Leonard's Hall Church the location of the team office.



Worship at St Leonard's Hall Church



St James' Hall Church

In addition to community activities, [St James' Hall Church](#) has hosted a number of church initiatives such as Messy Church, a youth club and Coffee and Chat sessions. The weekly youth club was most recently managed by an inter-generational missionary and youth support worker, latterly assisted by a curate for the particular benefit of the local CofE primary school. However, it suffered terminally with the recent depletion of the benefice team. The Coffee and Chat sessions still continue twice a month and are much enjoyed although more volunteers are required. Community activities include young children's sessions and parties, yoga and fitness classes, ballroom dance,

martial arts and a community choir. These draw people from around the whole of the Bridgnorth area, rather than the immediate community. The building is in generally good order with the grounds well worked by the Bridgnorth Community Gardens Project and it is the best technologically equipped church building in the benefice.

The three buildings of St Mary's PCC are run independently of each other – St Mary's itself and the two hall churches which have their own committees though these are ultimately responsible to the PCC. The hall churches generally cover their costs from a mixture of general donations and commercial lettings. Despite covid, both hall churches have modest reserves. St Mary's church has general income of around £75k per annum. 46% from planned giving, 11% via general donations (the Church is a major tourist attraction) and 13% gift aid. Permanent

legacies make up a further 21% of income with fundraising and fees from weddings and funerals accounting for the balance. The Church's parish offer for 2023 was £53k. At 31/12/23 general and designated reserves totalled £14k whilst restricted funds totalled £27k. Despite declining regular giving and general donations the church expects to balance its general fund in 2024 as energy costs have fallen.



The Village Churches

All the village churches have a close relationship with their communities and Morville, Tasley, Astley Abbots and Oldbury have village halls with a variety of community activities.

Morville, Aston Eyre, Acton Round and Monkhopton with Upton Cressett are parochial parishes within a single civil parish (Morville). Although each church is separate, the Morville community comes together as one for events such as a fete or joint services such as Remembrance Sunday.

Astley Abbots Holds a bi-monthly cafe church in the village hall. On special occasions such as Harvest and Christmas, it holds celebratory food and drink events sometimes in the village hall, private homes, and grounds nearby. The parish supports local families and charities, including links with the Catherine Phillips Educational Trust. It works with Gods Acre and is an Eco Church having gained the Silver Award which is A Rocha initiated. The congregation supports the Ride and Stride event, Bluebell walks, Open Gardens and is a Fairtrade Church. Music is a strength - the organist leads a joint Astley Abbots and Tasley choir which contributes to and enhances our worship on major festivals.

The parish has an attractive and engaging Facebook page keeping the local community informed.

Tasley village hall committee has strong links with the Church and organises regular fund-raising events such as "Flicks in the Sticks" and quizzes, for both the Church and other local charities. The village hall is used regularly by several groups and organisations together with hosting family parties. Tasley holds a Coffee Morning in the village hall on the 1st Monday of the month, which is proving to be very successful, with the proceeds going to local charities.

Oldbury St. Nicholas has been at the heart of the Oldbury community for over 900 years. Over more recent years events have been held such as art and quilting exhibitions, Wedding Fayres, concerts, play-readings, Flower Festivals & Open Gardens, all in collaboration with the Village Hall, and we plan to continue with this. We share a choir with Quatford, and they support all our church occasions despite dwindling numbers. We are also continuing to build on our good relations with Castlefields (County) School which is within the parish, and the visits of various year groups in support of their RE curriculum are an absolute delight. Needless to say, we need to grow more volunteers!



Tasley Bee's

Quatford

The parish strives to maintain an ethos of ministry and service through a programme of social events throughout the year, in a place that matters to the community. It occasionally combines an evening of fish & chips with a quiz at *Tony's Diner*, an event that is popular with both parishioners and churchgoers alike. From the end of April a "coffee, cake and chat" is planned whenever there is a fifth Sunday in the month. Open to all, it will encourage those in the community and walkers, including those with dogs, to visit. Following the Church A Rocha Eco silver award (2021) the church continues to integrate the core theme of sustainability and the hilly churchyard is open and grazed by sheep, in season, helping to keep it tidy as do the visiting volunteers from Caring for God's Acre together with a youth undertaking his Duke of Edinburgh community award.

The Morville Group

Morville Church draws on village support of around 275 residents to which outlying farm and hamlets add another 100. Although this is principally a farming community with the same families having used the church (and churchyard) for generations, the community includes people who commute into Telford, Wolverhampton and further afield and those who have retired to the area.

The church is popular for weddings no doubt due to its attractive setting adjacent to Morville Hall, a National Trust property. The church is well maintained through an active PCC which has successfully undertaken some major repair projects. Concerts and regular fund-raising events have drawn many visitors into the church which has interesting historical features dating back to 11th century. There is a keen bell ringing team.



Morville Church Service

Morville Church has a close relationship with Morville C of E Primary School with clergy involved in regular visits and the school holding assemblies once a term in the Church when parents and grandparents attend, and the church provides refreshments. The village has a well-equipped village hall in regular use by different groups as well as a public house which has recently reopened.

The PCC has responded to appeals for donations for disaster funding as well as supporting local charities including the Bridgnorth Food Bank.

Morville Church maintains its own web site and regular communication throughout the civil parish of Morville is undertaken through a monthly newsletter delivered to every home by local volunteers.



Monkhopton

Monkhopton is very much a farming community being amid an estate, which rents out land to farmers and some small businesses. In the spring and summer months there is an afternoon informal Tea and Cake get together on the third Sunday of the month. Each year there is a Harvest Thanksgiving service and a popular well attended Carol service at Christmas with other social activities throughout the year including a church barbeque and a Carols and Casseroles event

Aston Eyre is a linear village with a cluster of housing around the Church, the rest of the parish being comprised of wider spread rural properties and farms. There is no shop or other public amenity, and the Church with its small green, is a very important focal point of the village. It is first and foremost a place of worship but is also a gathering place for community events. The Church welcomes all and is always open in the hours of daylight. Many are attracted to visit, some for private devotion, others with an interest in its history and the early carving of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on the Tympanum.



There is a very active PCC, who meet in each other's homes, planning the work of the Church and the many enterprising fundraising events that enable it to continue to meet the Parish Share. A hospitality area has been established at the back of the church and there is a Saturday Coffee & Cake Morning each month to encourage others into the Church without the need for any commitment. This area is also suitable for meetings and children's activities. Community events are hosted on the Church Green and In the recent past these have included a Summer Cheese & Wine evening

and Carols by Lamplight. The green is also used for family celebrations and other activities.

Acton Round is an ancient hamlet, with a great sense of creativity and living history. The church always offers a warm welcome and a most beautiful churchyard, with good views across open farmland. Morville C of E primary school, Morville fete, various music or art events and the geographical location tie Acton Round together with the neighbouring parishes of Monkhopton, Aston Eyre and Morville.



Art and Craft Exhibition in the Church.
Parishioners Spinning

The Churches and Their Buildings

Many of our buildings are much appreciated by local people and visitors alike. They have historical and architectural significance and as a result, have listed status which can place constraints on repairs and alteration works. And as with many other older buildings, they can require considerable fund-raising, not to say investment of volunteer time, to commission and oversee its maintenance.

Bridgnorth St Mary Magdalene was designed by Thomas Telford and consecrated in 1796. It is a Grade II listed building and unusual in being oriented north south, to set off its position at the end of East Castle Street. The tower includes a ring of eight bells. The general condition of the fabric is good. The mechanical and electrical services are reasonable, but there is scope for improvement with the heating and lighting. However, there are serious problems arising from a lack of ventilation to the sub-floor voids in the aisles and in the nave so that timber decay and death-watch beetle must be dealt with, possibly with a complete redesign of the floor. Unsuccessful applications have been made to the Heritage Lottery Fund to complete this work which is desirable to improve the potential for more community and event use.



St Mary's Church

The condition of **St Leonard's Hall Church**, which accommodates the parish administration office, and of **St James' Hall Church** are both good, requiring only routine maintenance.

Tasley is a simple arrangement of a Nave and Chancel built out of local 19th century yellow stock brick. There is a small bellcote at the west end with a west gallery and the porch underneath. The church was built in 1840 on the site of a former church believed to have been of half-timbered construction with a thatch roof. In the church there are several ancient fittings including a font, Jacobean pulpit and lectern to match. The bells, recently refurbished, are now in full working order and one bell is believed to be of 14th century origin with the other 18th century. The building is well maintained and repairs are undertaken regularly to ensure that building is kept to a good standard. Part of the churchyard is closed. The new churchyard is in use and regularly maintained. This helps to provide additional income. The church is the highest point in Bridgnorth and enjoys spectacular views over Shropshire.

Astley Abbots is in the middle of a major investment with refurbishment and reordering of the church, thanks to a legacy from a benefactor. In the first phase it has had a renewed roof, internal joinery, replastering, and guttering. The bells were all restored 15 years ago. The organ was completely restored and enhanced. For the future, building work is awaiting a faculty for the kitchen and toilet facility, lighting, heating, reordering inside the back of the church and outside the entrance making it fully accessible to all.



Bird Boxes at Astley Abbots

Oldbury is essentially Victorian, having been substantially rebuilt in the mid 19th century. In 2022 a small stone extension was added to provide an accessible toilet, with kitchen units provided in the north aisle. The building is in generally good order.



Quatford is in good repair and has recently undergone an internal reordering with the removal of pews to allow the introduction of a nave altar. This has enabled the celebration of communion to be closer to the congregation whilst providing a suitable space for social events. The church is accessed by 34 steps and so an electrically powered platform lift was installed in 2005. The installation of a toilet and kitchen facilities in 2017/2019, has also proved highly beneficial for both church members and for those attending social events. In 2022 a specialist heating system was installed that heats the seat of the church pews. The system is designed to keep the congregation warm on a cold winter's day, without the need to try to heat the whole church. This initiative is part of the church's ongoing work to build on its Eco Church status.

Morville Church benefits from its attractive location, its historic features, and the facility of a car park. The building, which is Grade 1 listed, dates to 1118 when it was a priory founded by Shrewsbury Abbey. It retains almost all the original Norman elements. Major renovation work was undertaken on the tower in the 2000's and in 2009 six restored bells were reinstated on a new steel frame. Two new bells were added to give the tower a magnificent eight bell peel.



The interior presents a warm and friendly atmosphere and being adjacent to a National Trust property, Morville Hall, attracts many visitors. The church seats about 150. There is a kitchen and toilet in the vestry under the tower. This enables the Church to be used for a variety of events including quiet days for prayer, village fete where teas are provided in church, concerts and exhibitions.

Monkthopton St Peters is a 12th century Norman church founded by monks from Wenlock Priory and is situated about six miles from Bridgnorth. There are regular maintenance-check work parties in the spring and autumn to keep the building in good order.

Aston Eyre Endowed by the Lord of the Manor in 1132, this beautiful, small Church is steeped in history and is set at the heart of the village. The Church and its grounds are well cared for by a band of committed, faithful and hard-working volunteers. However, the nine-hundred-year-old building has several ongoing structural issues mostly related to damp and, in heavy rain, some water ingress.



Acton Round is in good order with only some regular maintenance required.



Section Five: The Wider Context: Bridgnorth Deanery

Bridgnorth Deanery in the Ludlow Archdeaconry is situated on the northeast corner of the Hereford Diocese. Bridgnorth Deanery comprises seven benefices of predominantly rural parishes. The area is geographically divided by the river Severn.

The majority of the chapter clergy have taken up post in the past 12 months and are new to the Bridgnorth Deanery. The clergy, greater chapter and deanery synod together are working to create sustainable flourishing parishes with buildings and congregations that we hope will meet the needs of our communities in this generation and beyond.

The Deanery is supported by the diocese of Hereford for matters of safeguarding, CMD, ministry training, mission development, PCC support and initiatives relevant to today's church and society.

Hereford Diocese

Life as a Member of the Clergy in the Diocese of Hereford

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 had a diocesan Year of Prayer in 2023, and 2024 is our Year of Faith, focusing on teaching and equipping all of us – clergy and lay – to be more confident in our faith.

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 PCCs to help discern how God is leading them to work out the plans and hopes you'll read in this Profile. This programme co-ordinates with our year-long Learning Community, "Servants and Stewards" run jointly by the central diocesan team and CPAS. The Learning Community meets monthly, and helps clergy reflect not just on the 'nuts and bolts' of leadership, but also on our own discipleship and how that links with, and is the basis for, our leadership. Previous cohorts have found Servants and Stewards very helpful not just in terms of the content but also in terms of building working partnerships with other clergy in the diocese.

If you would like an informal conversation about the parishes and the role, or about life as a member of the clergy in the Diocese of Hereford, please do get in touch with me by email or phone – Fiona.Gibson@hereford.anglican.org or 01588 673571.

The Ven. Fiona Gibson, Archdeacon of Ludlow



