



St Mary's, Clunton



St John the Evangelist, Newcastle



St Swithin's, Clunbury



St Mary's, Bettws y Crwyn

# Clun Valley Benefice

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

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



St Mary's, Hopesay



St George's, Clun

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## **Statement of our need: We would like someone who will:**

- Be positive about rural ministry, recognising that our village churches are churches for the whole community
- Will bring enthusiasm for and skill in bringing families into the heart of our churches
- Exercise a pastoral ministry to all ages within our churches and communities
- Lead the church community in setting and holding its vision for mission and growth
- Identify, encourage and develop gifts for ministry among the laity in the parishes
- Encourage and build on the existing partnerships with the church schools, Methodist Church in Clun and groups from the wider community and external organisations
- Work in collaboration with the PCCs and churchwardens to ensure effective organisation through good communication
- Nurture our churches, leading different styles of prayer and worship and build on our traditions
- Handle conflict constructively
- Help us to listen to what God is saying and discern where He is leading our churches
- Will take time to give attention to their own needs, allowing the personal, family and spiritual aspects of their own life to flourish alongside the demands of ministry

## **Person specification**

### **A person who:**

- Has a developed and maintained spiritual life
- Can demonstrate leadership qualities and can delegate efficiently and be flexible
- Has a good sense of humour and is approachable
- Can recognise and respond to the challenges of working in a rural community
- Has experience of working with lay people, recognising and helping to develop their skills
- Has good IT skills and can advise about financial matters
- Can seek advice and manage stressful situations effectively
- Is a confident driver on poor narrow roads in all weathers.

## **As committed members of our benefice**

- We look forward to welcoming a new vicar and working with him/her to spread God's word and carry out God's work in our communities
- We will offer help and support when needed
- We will be flexible and willing to respond positively to change
- We will always be there with a cuppa and friendly face.

# Vacancy Consultation

We have used this time of vacancy to reflect on our present situation and our hopes for the future as well as to consider the person we are seeking as our new vicar to take us forward as a United Benefice. Our Vacancy Consultation meeting was well attended with parishioners from 5 of our 6 churches and one member of Clun Methodist church attending. The output from this has helped shape our Statement of Need. This meeting helped us look at the following:

## **Session One**

### **What do we feel the area has to offer?**

Beauty of countryside, welcoming and supportive communities, a good quality of life for most, neighbourliness, lots of activities, local amenities in the valley – shops, fire service, cafes, pubs and surgery, good support for our churches from the community and the school.

### **What are the challenges of this area?**

Financial stress on low paid workers, few job opportunities, little affordable housing, very limited public transport, ageing population, fear about potential loss of service, volume/size of traffic, difficult road conditions especially in winter, same people on all committees with few new volunteers coming forward.

### **What do we feel the benefice has to offer?**

In discussion, groups were asked what it was about their current worship and witness which might attract people to join them, what might put people off and what were the greatest challenges facing their Church

### **What might attract worshippers?**

Newcastle and Bettws churches work well together holding joint services, Clunbury and Clunton churches feel they have a variety of worship, social activities and an interesting historic building.

Clun Church feels it has a variety of services and festivals and the congregation is welcoming of visitors and newcomers. The church in normal times, is an open building and they encourage its use for concerts, exhibitions which draw in the wider community. Newly installed facilities should enhance its use.

### **What might put people off?**

BCP services with traditional/archaic language, no toilet in most churches, challenging relationships within some of our churches, ageing populations with little contact with young families, size of the benefice and difficult travelling issues, expectations on newcomers expected to do too much too soon, parking difficulties at some churches, reluctance of some parishes to take part in benefice matters, lack of mid-week worship.

### **What are the main challenges?**

Finance issues, struggling to make ends meet and pay our parish offers, attracting more people, especially younger people.



## **Session 2 : What is God's future for us?**

The Diocesan Priorities for a Shared Future were circulated and discussed. Groups were asked to think of things which the churches are already doing with respect to those priorities, as well as things which could be done better or in addition. The feedback from the groups was as follows:

### **Shared Priority 1: Spiritual and numerical growth: Growing Christians of all ages and backgrounds**

What are we already doing?

Bible studies, Collective worship, Activities in our churches such as exhibitions and concerts to encourage more people into the building, services for schools, assisting with and running of charitable fundraising e.g Christian Aid soup and pud lunches, Macmillan coffee morning, Shropshire Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride and open garden scheme as well as responding to major disaster appeals.

Activities over the last few years have included Open the Book, Mums' Group in Clunbury Alpha course, Filling station, Trinity Hospital mid-week services, Mid-week prayer meetings, soup lunches.

In the wider church community, some of our congregations have been supporters of the Methodist Church teenagers' sleep-over for charity, Cafe Church.

Future plans and ideas would be to expand and revisit some of the activities mentioned above.

### **Shared Priority 2: Contributing to the Common Good**

What are we already doing?

Members of our congregations are involved in a wide range of community events including the Clun Community Larder, housed in St George's Church, Clun both as volunteers and contributors; Clun Valley Good Neighbours Scheme; act as school governors; are involved in school activities; contribute to two local magazines and the deanery magazine, ring bells, run art shows and service on parish councils.

Our churches are welcoming open buildings used for concerts, exhibitions to encourage community use.

Future plans and ideas:

We would like to see more school involvement; more foundation governors; more congregational involvement with the schools; with the appointment of a new Methodist minister and intergenerational worker, we would seek to strengthen our involvement with the Methodist Church; perhaps develop online relationships.

### **Shared Priority 3: Re-imagining ministry**

What are we already doing?

United worship between congregations, some existing good school relationships, Lay-led worship, good relationship with Clun Methodist Church with two joint services every month.

### **Future plans and ideas**

We must have flexibility regarding the role of our new incumbent, we need unity across the benefice, sustainability; to strengthen some school links, further develop worship patterns, build on the involvement of lay leaders and our one retired clergy in the valley.

## Facilitator's Reflections

The Clun Valley Benefice has been unfortunate in recent years in that it has experienced a rather high rate of turnover of clergy. This has understandably led to an unsettled feeling in some of the parishes. Despite that it was evident at the consultation that there remains a good number of committed Christian people in the parishes who are keen to support a new incumbent in taking forward some of the missional possibilities mentioned at the consultation.

It's important to affirm the strong and dedicated service of lay people in the parishes, and any new incumbent needs to be alerted to the need to support and work closely with them. There has in the past been an active Local Ministry Development Group in the Clun benefice, and it would be opportune to broach the possibility of re-launching something similar under the leadership of a new incumbent. It was rightly stressed that expectations of him/her need to be realistic, and so a suitably constituted team could add greatly to the task of re-imagining ministry in the valley in the years ahead.

Work with schools will obviously be crucial for engaging with the challenge to grow the churches as worshipping communities. Apart from being a worthwhile aim in itself, it would also address the problem of role-succession identified at the consultation.

It was a shame that not all the parishes were well represented, and this serves to underscore the need to consolidate a sense of benefice identity. While the individual character of each church should be affirmed, there is an equal need for collaborative working along the length of the Clun Valley. The consultation also recognised the presence of internal dissension in some churches. This too will have to be addressed, and has implications for the role description of the new incumbent.

Finally the strong long-term links with Clun Methodist church should be celebrated in the benefice profile. This is arguably the strongest ecumenical relationship in the diocese and, following the recent appointment by the Methodists of an intergenerational missionary, there exist exciting possibilities for shared working among the unchurched, not least among younger people. It would be a great shame if the churches of the benefice, under a new incumbent, were unable to take full advantage of the opportunities presented by this.

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5 September 2020

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

So said A. E. Housman in his poem ‘A Shropshire Lad’. That may have been true in 1895, although this area was a thriving farming area then but it is certainly not true in 2020. Despite the reduction in the population, transport, shops and pubs, there is still a great deal going on and it is said that you could be out every evening of the week at one club or another, somewhere in the valley.



The Clun Valley is in the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and lies between Craven Arms on the busy A49 and the Welsh border. The scenery is stunning.

The Clun Valley Benefice covers an area approx 17 miles long from Bettws y Crwyn near the Welsh border to Hopesay, the parish church for Aston on Clun. The only town in the benefice is Clun which lies approximately half way between. Roads in the valley are minor roads, many are very narrow with passing places and some areas and churches are difficult



to access especially in bad weather. Heavy snow can mean Bettws can only be reached by 4-wheel drive. In recent years there has been flooding making some places inaccessible. Driving between churches would not be a pleasant experience for an anxious driver.

**Bettws y Crwyn** is in the Upper Clun valley, the 'Welshry' of the Lordship of Clun, which did not become part of England, in the formal sense, until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The parish name comes from St Mary's Church and is roughly circular, nearly 5 miles in diameter. To the east are Llanfair Waterdine and Newcastle. To the north is the Kerry Ridgeway, in the south the Teme, in the west the Rhoddwyr Brook, and around these three is Wales.

Bettws y Crwyn is a dispersed parish, whose residents nestle among the hills - a truly rural parish, with no village settlement. This places the Church among three meeting places; the other two being the Parish Hall and The Anchor Inn. The Church and the Parish Hall are highly valued by the community, and the shared fund raising events receive excellent support. In the year 2000 Bettws y Crwyn won the title 'Shropshire Village of the Year', and also the accolade of 'Best Community Spirit' for the Midlands. This was no mean feat for an area that is not actually a village. It is an accurate testament to the residents who form a cooperative and caring community.

There are about 200 residents, some of whom are retired, and many of whom are, or have been, involved in farming. There are a few young families, some home based businesses and some affordable housing is being built for local need.

Next down the valley is **Newcastle on Clun** which has a rich history with ancient sites and a substantial stretch of the Offa's Dyke crossing the parish from north to south. Newcastle has no shop but does have a pub.

**Clun** is a very ancient town. The Saxon community was a hamlet on the south side of the river built around what is now St George's Church. Clun was listed in the Domesday Book and was obviously a place of prosperity even at that time. The Normans planned their new town north of the river, beside their castle, and the grid pattern of their streets still survives. The castle was built by Picot de Say, then eventually owned by the Fitzalans, who joined up with the Howards. The present owner of the castle is the Duke of Norfolk, and one of his titles is Baron Clun. It is managed by English Heritage.

Clun was granted its town charter in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. From mediaeval times to the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Clun was a bustling and lively centre boasting countless shops and pubs as well as its famous livestock markets. It was a market town serving a wide area stretching right up to the Welsh hills. The advent of motorised transport and







changes in social conditions has led to a gradual decline of Clun as a business centre. It is now a rural town to which people come on holiday and retire to, with a population of around 900 as opposed to about 1200 in 1851.

The gradual decline in Clun has seen the closing of many shops over the last 20 years. Despite this, Clun is an active community and still has two shops serving groceries, a medical centre, fire station, an ironmongers, hairdressers, gift shop, two cafés, two pubs and a recently opened Deli. There is some anxiety, however, about how long these will survive.

The three halls for hire for social events are well used. There is an annual Green Man Festival at May Bank Holiday and Carnival and Show at the beginning of August. There is a wide range of clubs and activities including bowling, badminton, wildlife, music, art, running, singing as well as several walking groups which cover a wide range of abilities. The well established Clun Valley Good Neighbours Scheme runs a helpline every weekday morning to assist members of the community with transport to urgent medical appointments and a wide range of other support services. It also runs a fortnightly café for the more frail and isolated members of the community called The Clun Friendly Café.

The petrol station in Clun closed in 2020 but the workshop remains for the present. Clun has only two buses a week, on Monday and Friday mornings. These go into Ludlow and back again a few hours later. The lack of public transport is of great concern in this area.

Travelling down the valley on the B4368 the next village is Clunton. Clunton is a small community made up of about 60 houses within the village and approximately 12 outlying properties dotted throughout Clunton Coppice and the Cwm. The Crown Inn, near the centre of the village, is a traditional country pub owned since 1994 by a group of local residents. A popular and very successful venue, run by a young couple who provide a friendly service, and have a reputation for a high standard of food.



In the centre of Clunton is St Mary's Church, built in 1870, a daughter church of St Swithin's Church, Clunbury. Over the river bridge is Clunton Coppice, which is a lovely area of sessile oak woodland owned by Shropshire Wildlife Trust. Once used for charcoal production it has an abundance of rare fungi and is an ideal habitat for pine martins.

Clunton and the surrounding areas have a number of well established bed and breakfast and holiday lets. The old school is now a small village hall, run by a committee that

organises social events throughout the year and is available for hire for meetings and private parties etc.

Every August Bank Holiday Monday the Clunton and Clunbury residents organise the Purslow Show and Gymkhana. The show is a very local event, a fun family day, including a very challenging hill run for all ages and abilities and popular with athletes throughout the Midlands. Profits from the show are given to local charities. Another popular event held in Clunton is apple pressing every autumn organised by the Clunton Scrumppers.

Travelling further east and turning south off the B4368, across two river bridges, is the village of Clunbury with its parish church of St Swithin's. Clunbury is a conservation village which sits between the river Clun and the steep side of Clunbury Hill which is popular with visitors and walkers. The village is the focal point of the parish, but the parish extends to the settlements of Beambridge, Coston and Twitchen, Obley, Little Brampton and Kempton.

Clunbury has about 60 dwellings mainly centred around the church and the main street. There is a friendly community feel to the village with an active village hall that runs a variety of events throughout the year, plus a regular café, giving the community a chance to meet up.

The surrounding landscape is hilly and well wooded with the Clun and Kemp rivers flowing through the village and on down the valley. The population is gathered into the main hamlets but there are many outlying properties, farms and houses, in all a total of more than 500 people. The main source of income is farming with mostly mixed farms of livestock and arable, but the area has diversified with a strong tourist economy with bed and breakfast and holiday cottages.

A few miles further down the valley is Aston on Clun which is in the parish of **Hopesay**. Hopesay village is a conservation area and consists of a small group of dwellings, most being large Victorian houses in their own grounds, and is occupied by some 62 people. St Mary's Church is located in the heart of the village of Hopesay and is the parish church for Aston on Clun. Hopesay's character derives from its setting in a valley with mature trees and its seclusion. It is on the lower slope of a hill surmounted by the Iron Age Burrow Fort on the west, and below Hopesay Hill to the east.



*Arbor Day Celebrations in Aston on Clun*

The entire Parish of Hopesay which the church serves is a geographical anomaly. It includes a total population of some 512 people, most of whom live in Aston on Clun and Broome, some 1 mile and 2 miles, respectively, to the south of the church. The parish also covers small groups of houses at Longmeadow End, about 2 miles from the village towards the small town of Craven Arms, and Round Oak, a mile or so to the north of Hopesay.

Aston on Clun is an active community with a community staffed shop and village hall which screens live performances from places such as the National Theatre. There is a fortnightly coffee morning and a monthly craft market, line dancing and table tennis all held in the village hall. Aston has an annual Arbor Day celebration in May and decorate their Arbor Tree with flags.

There is a care home in Hopesay parish at Broome.

## Safeguarding in the Benefice

The benefice has a safeguarding officer who is responsible for ensuring that all the necessary checks and training are carried out in all churches. She is the person who should be contacted should anyone in the parishes have concerns. She has regular meetings with the incumbent. Each year, every church reviews the benefice Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy and all PCCs are asked to adopt this at their APCM

## Worship in the Benefice

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

### **First and Third Sundays in the month.**

**9.45am** Holy Communion at St George's, Clun

**9.45am** (now 10am) Lay-led service at Hopesay. (During this interregnum and Covid-19 crisis, St Mary's, Hopesay has chosen to revert to a former time of **10am** for all services.)

**11.15am.** Holy Communion at St John's, Newcastle or St Mary's, Bettws.

**11.15am** Morning Prayer or Holy Communion at St Swithin's, Clunbury or Clunton led by a retired priest

### **Second and fourth Sundays of the month**

**8am** Holy Communion (BCP) at St George's, Clun

**9.45am** (now 10am) Holy Communion at St Mary's, Hopesay.

**9.45am** Lay-led service at St George's or joint service with Clun Methodist Church (10am)

**11.15am** Holy Communion at St Swithin's, Clunbury or St Mary's, Clunton

11.15am Family service at Newcastle or Bettws

### **In months with a Fifth Sunday**

**10am** benefice service rotating round the parishes.





## Other services

At other times retired clergy living in the area have been used to take services. Hopesay has a lay reader who has been taking one service a month and other churches have organised lay-led services.

A Benefice Memorial service is usually held in Clun on the Sunday nearest to All Souls Day. Also in November, Remembrance services are held in Hopesay, Clun involving the local branch of the Royal British Legion, Clunbury and at the Purslow War Memorial. Newcastle school also has a Remembrance service in the churchyard.

There has been a rota for our Christmas Eve midnight service with each church having a Christmas service either earlier on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day. Each church has its own Easter Day service, harvest festival and carol service. These extra services are usually very well supported by the local communities.

In addition to services held in the six benefice churches, twice a month St George's Church congregation joins with the Clun Methodist Church congregation either at St George's or at the chapel for a joint service. These are usually lay-led but in September the Methodist church welcomed a new minister and he may play an active part in future. This opportunity to meet regularly with Clun Methodist Church is an important part of St George's worship. There is also a Mennonite community in nearby Craven Arms who worship in Aston on Clun Village Hall and an active Quaker meeting who worship in Clun.

In all our six churches congregations are older people. However, there are three primary schools in the benefice and all three use their parish church for services during the year. In addition, St John's Newcastle have a regular family service either at Newcastle or Bettws, usually on the second Sunday of the month. The benefice has identified further involvement with the three schools as a priority for both a new incumbent and lay people.

## The Vicarage

The Vicarage is in Clun and is a modern, detached, family sized house, built in 1989. The accommodation includes lounge, dining room, study, kitchen, cloakroom, utility room, four bedrooms and family bathroom. The house has full oil fired central heating, double glazing, cavity wall and loft space insulation. The boiler was replaced in 2005.

There is a tarmac entrance drive with cattle grid and parking area which can accommodate several vehicles, and a generous single garage. The gardens have been well maintained, predominantly laid out to lawns. There is also an orchard.

The Vicarage is in Vicarage Road, Clun, just two minutes walk from St George's church.



# St Mary's, Bettws y Crwyn



## The Church

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

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

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

It became a parish church on the Dissolution of the monasteries.

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

We had a quinquennial report this year, and the church is in good repair, but expensive to heat. However, we have been fortunate in obtaining an annual electricity grant from the Powys Association for Voluntary Organisations ( PAVO) which administers community funding provided by Garreg Llwyd wind farm. This covers the cost of our electricity. We are awaiting final planning permission for low level lighting to paths to make the church safer after dark. We have the funding for this – also from PAVO, the faculty has been obtained, and the archaeological supervision is on standby but work cannot commence until the final approval of the council.

The Churchyard has been very well maintained for many years by two heroic parishioners. Now in their eighties, they have retired, leaving a legacy hard to follow. However, teams of parishioners have volunteered to each maintain the churchyard for a

month in the spring, summer and autumn. We are now looking to manage the area along the principles of 'Caring for God's Acre', and some areas are managed in a way that encourages wild flowers to bloom.



Generations of Bettws people are buried in the graveyard, and their graves are important to local families. It is notable that those graves have been carefully tended, even during lockdown. In addition the paths are very narrow, and the grass either side mown for safety reasons. It is important to keep the churchyard in the excellent state that has always attracted the admiration of visitors in the visitors book. A careful regard to the balance of nature and nurture is the aim. The churchyard is beautiful, and has the most stunning view of the Clun Valley.

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

St Mary's is visited by many people during the year. The visitors' book indicates the numbers of its visitors, and reflects their delight at the peaceful ambience of the church, and the way in which it is cared for and loved.

## Worship

Our services have, for some years, been shared with Newcastle. We alternate communion services. Usually Bettws has the first Sunday in the month, while Newcastle has the third Sunday. The second Sunday is the popular family service, which is less formal and aimed at being child friendly. It is an opportunity to invite parents (and grandparents) to attend with their children, and offers the children the chance to participate if they wish to. These services alternate month by month between the two churches. There are also some services that alternate year by year. Christmas day, Easter Sunday and our Lambing thanksgiving services do this. These can involve participation of children and adults of both parishes. The 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday is Evensong, which is a well liked service. It is held in St Mary's Church – the only service held separately – and is layperson led.

Every fifth Sunday there is a Joint Service with the other churches in the Benefice.



## Congregation

The attendance at normal services is generally between 8 and 15. The average age used to be 60, but this is reduced by the presence of young people at family services. There is a core of regular attendees, supplemented by others when asked to read the lessons.

For services at special festivals or occasions, such as Harvest and Carol Service, the church is full. Children from Newcastle School, the Young Farmers and the Bettws Choir are usually involved in these. These are often followed by refreshments in the church, parish hall, or hosted in the home of a member of the parish.

## Community Outreach

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

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

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

In addition to formal PCC meetings, its members occasionally hold 'kitchen meetings' in their homes to discuss particular issues. An example of this has been for Mission Action Planning. This has made good progress this year – led by an ordinand, who was, until recently, a member of St John's church in Newcastle.

The church is loved by the parish. It is felt to be very special. In many ways it is unique. It is situated in a dispersed deeply rural parish that has no village centre, and it is one of only three meeting places. Its people are loyal and supportive. We once won an award for 'best community spirit in the midlands' in the Calor Village of the year competition. It was quite a while ago – but those people are still living here, helping to make this a wonderful place in which to live.



# St John's, Newcastle



## The church

St. John's is a quarter of a mile from the centre of Newcastle village, on a minor road to Whitcott Keysett, just off Offa's Dyke, with wonderful views over the upper Clun valley. It was built in 1848 by Edward Haycock on land given by the Earl of Powis. It has a hammer beam roof and lancet windows, pine pews, organ case and pulpit. The east window was designed by David Evans. It is in good repair, light and airy, warm and welcoming.

It has an interesting lychgate which swivels in the middle like a turnstile. This has recently been listed. The churchyard is regularly maintained and is a credit to our church.

## Worship

Services are shared with St Mary's Bettws on a regular basis alternating the venue each month. We have a joint family service which has been running for about 3 years, joint communion and a lay-led evening prayer. Average size of congregation is 20 in Summer and 15 in Winter.

The children from the school are involved with the harvest and Christmas services when the church is full. The Mothering Sunday benefice service is held in Newcastle Community Centre again with a full attendance.



*Practising for harvest*



*Christingles*



## Electoral roll and parochial church council

There are 30 on the electoral roll. The PCC has 6 member and they meet regularly.

## Finances

The church finances are sound and we pay our parish offer in full every year. Our biggest fund raisers are our coffee mornings held every month. They are well supported and are held sometimes in the community centre and sometimes in people's homes.

This last 12 months we have been busy fundraising for our roof to be repaired. The slates will be re-used. We need to raise £40,000. So far we have raised just over £25,000.

## Community outreach

Church members take on a number of rolls in the community. These include, chair of parish council, secretary to the Bettws WI and chair of school governors.

The community centre is used by the church for the Mothering Sunday service, a joint service with Bettws and Clun.



*Newcastle church's unusual lychgate, now listed*



*School work displayed in church*



*School children searching for Easter eggs*



# Newcastle CE Primary School

Newcastle CE Primary School is situated in the village of Newcastle, four miles up the valley from Clun. It is a small Church of England school with 22 on role at the end of the 2019-20 academic year, and 26 due to be on role at the start of the 2020-21 academic year. The school is part of The Blue Hills Federation, which was formed in September 2017 to support the education of children in rural areas and is led by the Executive Head Teacher, Miss Anna Cook and the Lead Teacher on the site, Mrs Ruth Gittins. There are seven other members of staff employed at the school either as teachers, teaching assistants, administrators or premises staff, the majority of which are part time. At the heart of the school are its vision and values which are the same as those of The Blue Hills Federation and we pride ourselves on the family ethos of the school regularly referring in collective worship with the children of the school as our family.

In January 2018, the school received a good outcome in its Ofsted inspection with the report stating *'All pupils in this small school receive a high-quality education. [There is a] close-knit and effective team whose members all share [a] dedication to the school. [There is a] passion and commitment to providing pupils with wide and varied learning experiences in this rural setting. Pupils benefit from a rich and varied curriculum, which enables them to become well-rounded individuals who are very well prepared for the next stage of their education by the end of Year 6...High expectations, coupled with positive relationships between staff and pupils, help pupils to develop into confident and independent learners. As a result, all pupils, including the most able, are making good progress across the curriculum.'* Ofsted report 09-01-18.

The children who attend Newcastle CE Primary School travel from a wide catchment area of approximately 5 miles at its furthest point, which covers three parishes: Newcastle, Bettws y Crwyn and Llanfair Waterdine. Some children travel further as they come from across the Welsh border, since the closure of a small school in Beguildy in 2013. Other parents choose to send their children to the school from outside of the catchment area. The majority of the children live outside of the village and travel by designated transport or by car.

In September 2020, 54% of the children will travel by designated transport provided by the Local Authority; 31% will be brought to school in a car by parents and 15% will walk to school as they live in the village. Whilst the children live in a farming community, only just over 50% of the families are involved in that occupation, with other families running their own business or employed in other sectors.

The school is highly involved in the community taking part in a



*Harvest Lunch*

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





# St George's, Clun

## The Church

St George's is the largest church in the benefice. It has a circular churchyard and there is evidence of a Saxon church being on the site towards the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century. Parts of the existing church date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Internally the church is large and airy with both north and south aisles. Apart from the tower it was extensively rebuilt in 1877 by



the famous Victorian architect G E Street.

The Norman columns in the nave were carefully restored. In the north aisle a plaster ceiling was taken down to reveal the splendid 14<sup>th</sup> century roof timbers, and where necessary the lovely 22 carved angels had their wings renewed.

The south aisle, which had been as wide as the north aisle, was taken away and a new smaller aisle built on earlier foundations. This reduced the height of the roof and allowed ancient clerestory windows to be reopened.

A vestry at the east end of the north aisle was removed to make way for the present Lady Chapel, panelled with carved portions of the old box pews. A new Chancel was built to Street's design.



The pulpit has some fine Jacobean carving. The font is ancient standing on a more recent base and having interesting apotropaic carvings on its west face.

The tower, the lower part of which may have been built for defence before the Normans built the castle on the other side of the river, has housed a set of bells since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In 1549 there were four, in 1681 six, in 1914 eight and now, since 1994, there are ten. These are much used by our own and visiting bell ringers.

The lychgate is much travelled. It was originally built in 1723, taken down in 1841 to make way for iron gates, re-erected at the gateway to Hand Causeway, returned to its original position about 1881, and restored in 1956.



In 2019 a new kitchen and toilet were installed, paid for by a legacy, various grants, and local donations and fundraising.

The oldest feature of all is the yew tree a little distance from the north side of the church. At one time it had a girth of 33ft 7in (10.24m) which has been calculated to mean that it was here when the very first place of Christian worship was built on this lovely site, back in Saxon times. That makes it over 2000 years old. The churchyard is managed in accordance with the recommendations of the 'Caring for God's Acre' project.



*John Osborne, the playwright, and his wife, Helen are buried in the churchyard*

## Worship

St George's offers worship every Sunday and until recently BCP HC every second and fourth Sunday at 8am. Our main service in St George's each week is at 9.45am in accordance with the benefice pattern of holy communion on the first and third Sunday and a lay-led service on the second and fourth. Two of these services each month are usually held jointly with the Methodist Congregation. One of these will normally be at St George's at 9.45am and the other at the Methodist Church at 10.00am. A Benefice Service is held at 10am, every fifth Sunday and rotates round the benefice churches.

Our usual attendance at 8am holy communion is 8-10 worshippers, at 9.45 am 15-20 and 40 at Joint Services. At other times such as festivals the congregation can swell to 70+ An annual Memorial service for the Benefice is held at St George's on the first Sunday in November at 6pm and an annual remembrance service. The average age of our congregations is 70+ with a handful of children attending services which are joint with Clun Methodist Church. We have not had a junior church for some considerable time. However, St George's Academy school does use the church at Easter, Christmas and harvest.

## Link with the Methodist Church

St George's has had a very close link with Clun Methodist Church since 1995 when a common Declaration of Intent was signed 'to make visible the unity of Christ's people in Clun'. This declaration was witnessed by the then Bishop of Ludlow and the Chair of the Wolverhampton and Shrewsbury Methodist District. It contained references to a number of areas of activity in which the two congregations could work together.

The declaration did not set up a formal Local Ecumenical Project, though it looked forward to something of the kind in the future. In 2007 it was agreed that it might be more fruitful to look at such questions again once reorganisation of the parishes and benefices was clearer.

One of the pledges in the declaration states:

'To co-operate as churches in ministry and pastoral care, understanding that future appointments for ministry remain the prerogative of each church or denominational authority, but expressing the desire that such future appointments will be made in the spirit of this declaration.'

Much has been accomplished in the past 20+ years. Although it is still 'work in progress', the two congregations meet in worship twice a month. United services often attract larger congregations than the two separate churches combined. Members of both churches are involved together in many activities in the community.

There is a member from the Methodists on Clun PCC. A member of St George's church is a member of the Clun Methodist Council. The Clun Methodists are a 'gathered congregation' from all along the valley and therefore many of them are living in the six parishes of the Benefice.

## Electoral Roll and Parochial Church Council

There are currently 55 on the Electoral Roll. The PCC currently has six members including a representative of the Methodist Congregation.

## Finances

In recent years we have succeeded in paying our parish offer (£17,800 in 2020)

During lockdown we invited people to give by standing order and this currently amounts to £800 per month and associated gift aid. In normal times we also have the usual income from fees and collections.

We also have restricted funds for building work, the bells, organ and churchyard, all reasonably well funded.





Fundraising events include concerts, craft fairs, open gardens at The Hurst, and the annual Gardens Open event. We also support Shropshire Historic Churches Trust. The pandemic has of course curtailed our usual fundraising programme.

## Pastoral Care and Community Outreach

Clun is a caring community with a well established Good Neighbours and Clun Good Friends Schemes offering support of all kinds to older people. Members of the church take on many roles within the various organisations in the town.

St George's church is open every day and welcomes visitors. We feel that the church is for everyone and through events such as exhibitions, concerts and craft fairs we encourage the public to be part of it.

The acoustics at St George's are considered to be superb and the church has been used for many concerts covering a wide range of music. We are the home of Clun Valley Music, a group of professional musicians who perform regularly attracting an audience from a wide area.



Our many exhibitions have been greatly appreciated especially our WW1 commemoration in 2018 which ran for two weeks and attracted over 200 visitors.



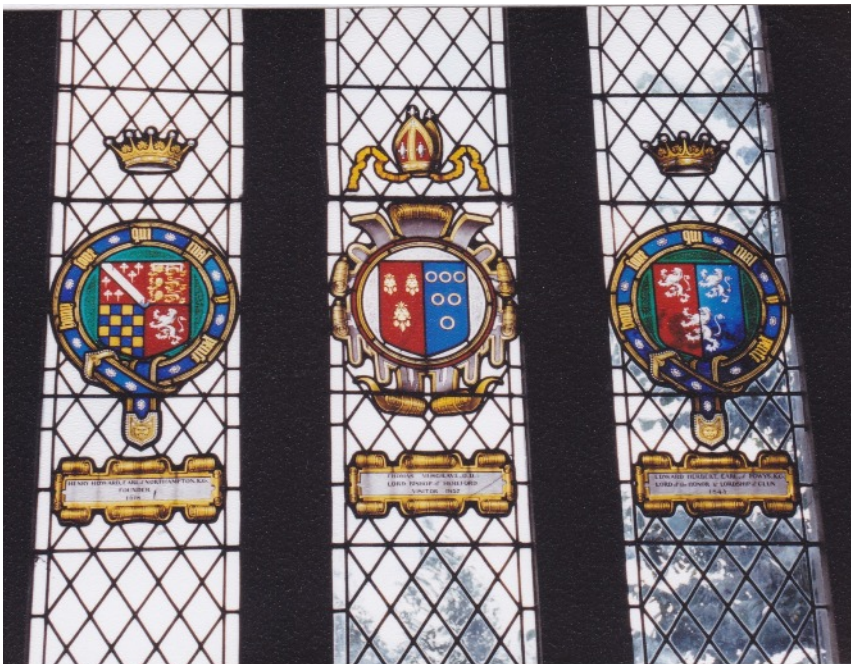


## Trinity Hospital, Clun

Trinity (as the locals call it) is a group of almshouses entered through iron gates from Hospital Lane. Henry Howard, Earl of Northampton, built it in 1614, its purpose to provide charitable accommodation for twelve old men of good character. Residents wore a livery gown of blue emblazoned with a red and silver badge. On Sundays top hats were worn and the men taken to church by horse drawn carriage.



The rules were changed some years ago to allow married couples to occupy some of the larger cottages.



*East window of Trinity Hospital Chapel*



*Statues of former Trinity residents stand in the grounds*

## Worship

The Vicar of Clun is an ex-officio Trustee and also titular warden of Trinity Hospital. The trustees allow St George's to use the chapel for worship but the vicar is responsible for any worship that occurs there and for ensuring safeguarding procedures are adhered to.

Until recently, BCP services of either Holy Communion and Morning Prayer were held each Tuesday morning attracting worshippers from both St George's and Clun Methodist Church as well as some older residents who cannot manage the hill up to St George's for worship. It is hoped that a new incumbent would wish to re-establish services at Trinity.



# St George's C E Academy

St George's is a happy, creative school that is caring, nurturing, challenging and dynamic in equal measure; our pupils are excited by their learning and are each recognised as individuals, knowing their own uniqueness and respecting the uniqueness of others. Our school currently has approximately 65 children on roll; small enough to ensure each child is valued as an individual, but large enough to have a football team! We have excellent facilities for three to five year olds in our Foundation Stage Unit. 'Forest School' is well-established and integrated into our school life. We are committed to giving every single child the opportunity to make the right choices, to do their best and to realise their maximum potential; we promote excellence and push the boundaries of achievement by working together, learning from each other with warmth, humour and kindness; our pupils become confident, motivated and positive 'can do' children, fully prepared to take full advantage of the next stage in their learning journey.

Our mission is therefore to provide a caring, stable environment and academic excellence, bound by our strong Christian values and supported by our community, while preparing our pupils for their life long learning journey. We believe that Education for Sustainable Development is core to this mission.

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

The School aims to serve its community by providing education of the highest quality within the context of Christian belief and practice. It encourages an understanding of the meaning and significance of faith and promotes Christian values through the experience it offers to all pupils. As a Voluntary Aided Church School, collective worship lies at the heart of the school day and allows everyone to gather together as one community.

Within the context of Christian belief and practice, worship includes active engagement, praise, readings, drama, prayers and reflection.



At St George's our children have many opportunities to take part in wider community events, such as Green Man Day, St George's Day, sporting activities involving other schools and musical performances to audiences made up of people from our local community and beyond.



We take an active role in Church festivals. The school also encourages children to play a role in many charity events each year and the children regularly initiate and organise fund-raising events themselves.

*School children exploring the churchyard*

# St Swithin's, Clunbury



## The Church

The present grade 1 listed church was built in the 12th century as some of the doors and windows indicate, but it may have been built on an earlier religious site as the semicircular shape of the wall on the west side of the churchyard suggests. It was extended in the later Norman period, and its tower has undergone various

repairs. There was much restoration in the Victorian era. It has an excellent organ in good condition. The six bells which date from 1620 to 1887 were restored and rehung in 2009, and are often used by the Bellringers group, and visiting ringers.

The building and the churchyard are generally in good condition and Quinquennial repairs from April 2016 have been completed.

A project to improve facilities in the church has commenced. This is in the vestry and includes much needed toilet and kitchen facilities. Improved access to the bell chamber with a new spiral staircase is also taking place together with a replacement boiler. We are fortunate to have much support in the community for regular and less common tasks that need to be carried out. These include everything from churchyard mowing, flower arranging, cleaning, hoisting of flags and winding of clocks and they are done with care and commitment. We have an active and enthusiastic group of bellringers who practice every Wednesday evening when permitted. There is also a good set of handbells.

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

## Worship

Currently the pattern of services held in either St Swithin's or St Mary's, Clunton include Holy Communion, Matins and Evensong, or Service of Morning Worship. Regular congregations are small and mostly older people but the great festivals of the Church year are well attended. The provision of mulled wine/hot cross buns and other refreshments as appropriate, adds to the sense of the Church's place at the heart of our community.

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

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



The school uses the church at Christmas, Easter and harvest as well as a Leavers Service in the summer when the PCC give a bible to each leaver, and the children have provided art work for each festival. These services are well supported by families and other members of the church community. Several of the families now come from outside the village and the provision of refreshments before the services has fostered good relationships, and a little fundraising is ring-fenced towards a space for prams and wheelchairs, by the removal of a few pews.

## PCC

There is an active and supportive PCC currently with 12 members with a diverse range of experience of business, farming, architecture, accountancy and teaching. There are 101 people on the Clunbury Electoral Roll

## Population

The school has brought several young families to the parish. However many of the people are retired, with some, particularly the farming families, having lived in the area for more than three generations. Whilst in some cases there is limited employment opportunities for young people from the village, the introduction of superfast broadband has meant that new opportunities are available to run a business or work from home. However, some have found opportunities as gardeners, carpenters, fencing contractors, cleaners and many other trades to meet the demands of the retired and the farming and tourism businesses in the area. There is a lack of affordable housing for young people, public transport is not frequent and costs of travel and house prices are high.

The main source of income in the area is agriculture and ancillary businesses that support the industry - with mostly mixed farms of livestock and arable crops who take advantage of environmental schemes to boost their income. Farms of every size and type are proud of the food they produce and the landscape they sustain. That landscape also sustains the second thread of income in the Parish - tourism, with holiday lets and bed and Bbreakfast. There are also a number of self- employed tradesmen such as builders, electricians, plumbers, decorators and even a gin distiller to mention a few. Some residents have offices or businesses away from the area and are able to work from home.

## Community Outreach

There is an excellent local newsletter, the Parish Post, which is distributed throughout the Parish and keeps us all in touch with local events and news. The Parish Post also has an excellent website and other social media platforms so people can keep in touch. Internet and mobile phone communication is generally good for a rural area.

Members of the Church take their Christian values into many roles in our community. We have Parish Councillors, a magistrate, Friends of Clunbury School, members of British Legion, Shropshire NFU, South Shropshire Healthcare to name but a few.

The Village Hall committee organises a fortnightly coffee morning which helps foster a strong community spirit in the village. The enthusiastic committee organises monthly entertainment and events. Members of the Village Hall Committee are on the PCC.

Clunbury Parish is a supportive, lively, hospitable and caring community.

## Finances

The church is financially sound, thanks to some generous legacies and currently holds sufficient funds to pay our Parish Offer for 2020/2021. A number of generous covenants are received, amounting to approximately £3,000 per annum. Fundraising has included barbeques, coffee mornings, garden teas, concerts and patronal festivals that are all well supported by the village and people connected with the church. However a bi-annual Promise Auction held in the local pub at Purslow raises most money and demonstrates the generosity of the people in giving items and enthusiastically bidding to support the church. A 100 Club has been operating for 28 years, bringing in over £700 pa profit, again this is supported by people far and wide. Events have been disrupted by Covid-19, so we are also looking at other ways of raising money, such as donations through shopping on line and a 'Friends' group. The provision of toilet and kitchen facilities in the church will increase the amount of fundraising functions in the church.

## Clunbury CE Primary School

Clunbury CE Primary School is situated in the beautiful village of Clunbury which is 5 miles from Clun and 5 miles from Craven Arms. It is a small but growing Church of England school with approximately 60 pupils on roll at the end of the 2019-20 academic year. The school has a thriving nursery which currently has an additional 15 children on roll. The school is part of The Blue Hills Federation, which was formed in September 2017 to support the education of children in rural areas and is led by the Executive Head Teacher, Miss Anna Cook. The position of Lead teacher is currently a shared position between Mr. Nick Copestake (who is also the SENDCo) and Mrs Kathryn Jones. The school has 3 classes as well as the nursery. There are 3 teachers and 6 teaching assistants. The school benefits from a peripatetic music teacher. The school also has a part-time administrator, a member of staff who serves lunches and two lunch-time supervisors. One of the lunch time supervisors is also the Cleaner-in-Charge.

Prior to the establishment of the Federation, the school had experienced a difficult period resulting in a rapid turn-over of staff and lack of continuity. In November 2017, the school received an outcome of 'Requires Improvement' in its Ofsted inspection. Although areas of improvement were rightly identified, it was pleasing that the report acknowledged the hard work and foresight of the governing body in ensuring that the school became part of a strong and supportive Federation. The report also acknowledged that since the establishment of the Federation the school had begun to halt the recent decline and was beginning to make good progress. This progress has continued and the school is now in a strong position. The school expected a follow-up Ofsted Inspection in the Spring Term but this was postponed due to the COVID-19 situation. We are hoping that when we do receive

our next Ofsted outcome, the hard work and support given by all members of our Federation to Clunbury School will result in a rating of good.

The children who attend Clunbury CE Primary School, travel from a wide rural area as well as the nearby town of Craven Arms. A large majority of the children are transported to school by bus.

Like all the schools in our Federation, fundamental to the school are its vision and values and we pride ourselves on the family ethos of the school and our importance within our local community. The school has strong links with parents who are very protective of their school. The school encourages the involvement of parents in the work of the school wherever possible. The school is also supported by volunteers within the local community who give of their time to support the school through various activities such as listening to children read and running a very well supported gardening club. The school takes part in local community events such as the Purslow Show. The school has excellent links with the other two schools in the Federation- enjoying joint events such as the annual Choir concert and residential experiences. We also have strong links with other schools in our local community. For example, in February the school took part in the I Sing Pop event which involved local schools performing Christian based, contemporary songs at the church at Bishop's Castle.

The school takes its position as a church school very seriously and is keen to strengthen its work in this respect even further. The school ensures that its core values are integrated throughout all the work of the school. Collective Worship is highly valued part of the school day for both pupils and staff alike. We welcome Open the Book regularly to lead collective worship. RE lessons are well planned. The teachings of Christianity are fundamental to our teaching. Having said this, the school seeks to ensure that the curriculum provides pupils with knowledge about and respect for all faiths. We recognise that it is especially important for pupils living in a fairly isolated and rural community to have the opportunity to understand and appreciate and understand the wider context of the UK.

The school is highly involved in the community, taking part in a number of church services during the year at St. Swithin's, our local church. Harvest Festival is celebrated in the church as is our Remembrance Service. There is a Carol Service for all of the community including the school. Frequently the school leads its own Christmas Nativity service in the church. Alternatively, the school performs a nativity related play in the Village Hall. This is well attended by both parents and the community. The children display special work in the church and provide service to the church by taking responsibility for cleaning and caring for the church.

Clunbury school is looking forward to the appointment of a Vicar who is keen to be involved in the life of the school and is committed to supporting and guiding our school community as we move forward and continue to flourish.



# St Mary's, Clunton



## The Church

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

## Worship

As a daughter church to Clunbury, our services are shared with St Swithin's, with the venue alternating between our two churches on a monthly rota. There is one service each month held in St Mary's, Clunton. Common Worship Holy Communion one month and Evensong the next - usually lay-led.

The average attendance at these services is 12, and the majority of the congregation are retired. Up to 40 attend special services such as harvest, thanksgiving and the Christmas Carol Service. We enjoy group services with the other churches in the Benefice when there is a 5th Sunday in the month.

## Maintenance and Repair

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

Fire extinguishers are checked and maintained annually. As required by our insurance, we have used Smart Water to mark the small amount of lead on the roof, the cross and the metal gates and railings.

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

## Finance

Fundraising is vital to ensure the church stays functioning, but the events organised also provide popular social occasions and are well supported by the village. There are two coffee mornings each year, and other events have included cheese and wine evenings, garage sales, open gardens and BBQs. Every September a team of cyclists and walkers

support the Shropshire Historic Churches Trust Ride and Stride and raise sponsorship to share between the Trust and our church.

In 2017 we started a 100 Club, which has proved popular and provides an income to the church of up to £600 pa.

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

So far, we have always managed to pay our Parish Share promptly and in full. Increasing utility and insurance costs are a concern, and it is difficult to warm the church in winter.

## Electoral Roll

There are currently 20 on the electoral roll.

## Churchwardens and Church Council

Our churchwardens are from St Swithin's, Clunbury, but St Mary's has a Secretary, Treasurer/Gift Aid Officer and a Church Council with 6 members.

## Community Outreach

Our treasurer is the leader of an Open The Book team, that goes into Clunbury School twice a month. The children there enjoy the bible stories and love to be part of the dramatisation. At Easter and Christmas we hold Open the Book in the church and invite parents to attend.

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

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

Clunton is a close-knit community that enjoys all the social activities and works together to support the church, the village hall and the pub.



# St Mary's, Hopesay



## The Church

St Mary's Hopesay is ancient for the most part, having been built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century with later medieval additions and with some more recent late Victorian refurbishments particularly in the chancel area. The church is well used and carefully looked after, is clean and welcoming and it has a good atmosphere, with a constant supply of flowers. Regular weekly use ensures that this welcome is

kept up and the maintenance and repair of the church is looked after by an enthusiastic PCC.

Because it is situated in magnificent countryside between Hopesay Hill and a significant iron age fort, St Mary's is also visited by many walkers and the PCC has a policy of keeping the door open throughout the day. When the first lockdown ended we made it possible for visitors to continue to visit for individual prayer in a safe and hygienic environment. Many visitors comment appreciatively on the setting of the church with its wild, rural graveyard which often has sheep grazing within it to keep the grass in trim. We were perhaps too famous for our unkempt rural style where the grass had to be held down to view the gravestones; nowadays enthusiastic PCC members work hard to keep the main surrounding graveyard and pathways in good trim. We adhere to a conservation mowing plan when keeping the paths clear.

## Worship

The PCC has for many years maintained services at the Church every Sunday. Making this possible has in large part depended on the efforts of lay service leaders, as well as the involvement of retired priests living in the community, particularly for Holy Communion services.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday services are usually led by the Churchwardens with growing involvement from other members of the congregation. There is some flexibility in this respect as we have a Reader who is normally able to lead one service per month which may either be the first or the third. (The Reader, Sonia Phippard, organised and led about six successive Sunday services by means of Zoom during the lockdown period in 2020.) There are special festival services on Good Friday, at Easter, Harvest and Christmas, with Crib Services, Carol Services and Midnight Mass.



## Average Size of Congregations

Communion Services 22, Morning Prayer 17, Informal Worship 18.

The average age of worshippers is 60 plus.

## Electoral Roll and Parochial Church Council

There are currently 52 on the Electoral Roll. The PCC has 9 members and meets four times a year either in church, or in PCC members' homes. The exception has been during the Coronavirus crisis when we have conducted some meetings about specific issues, such as opening the church for private prayer, by means of online Zoom meetings.

## Finances

This overview takes account of the last full year of accounting which was to end December 2019 but has not offered an analysis of what has happened during 2020 to date. Once again, the PCC saw expenditure exceed income in 2019. Total income (before investment gains) declined by approximately £1,400 to £14,689. Expenditure also fell slightly to £16,686 (however, this largely reflects timing differences in some payments, so cannot be considered a trend). Thus we show a net income shortfall of £1,996 for the year, despite healthy fund-raising activity.

On a more positive note, we benefited from strong investment returns in our CCLA investment accounts as strong stock markets at the end of the year resulted in the value of our accumulation shares increasing by over 20% and our income shares gaining over 18%. It is important to note that these gains are unrealized and share prices can fall as well as rise in the future. Nevertheless, the gains mean that the PCC's total assets at year-end increased from £54,239 to £60,506. Of this balance, it should be noted that £11,034 is represented by Endowment and Restricted funds and £1,000 is represented by the capitalized valuation of the Hopesay Churchyard Meadow.

Fund-raising activity improved slightly again in 2018, primarily from the highly successful flower arranging demonstration, the wreath-making day and their accompanying fund-raising activities. Fund-raising activities generated £1,402, up from £1,226 last year (which, itself, was substantially above the previous year).

Income from Planned Giving, Gift Aid envelopes and loose plate collections raised £8,722, down from the previous year's £9,493. This source of income continues to be our primary funding source and we need to be concerned at yet another year of decline. The PCC has joined the national Parish Giving Scheme for 2020 to help us address this problem. It is a good sign that we have some nine regular parishioners subscribed to the scheme, none of whom are regular churchgoers who will between them raise more than £2,000 per year proving the efficacy of this scheme. The Parish Giving Scheme will also allow us to maximise our Gift Aid benefits. Tax recoverable on Gift Aid in 2019 declined from £2,333 to £2,032.

Fees from weddings and funerals also declined slightly from £1,311 to £1,242. The Parish Offer payment of £9,000 remains one of the church's largest expenses. In addition we made an ex-gratia payment of £500 during the year for a total payment of £9,500, an increase of £800 over the previous year.

Charitable donations fell substantially as we changed our accounting methodology to exclude agency payments to charities (eg collections made on behalf of charities at funerals) from the PCC accounts.

The PCC has total net assets at year-end of £60,506. This leaves the PCC with sufficient resources to allow it to face the immediate future with confidence although, again, fund-raising activities and a commitment to the Parish Giving Scheme will be necessary to allow income to match anticipated expenditure.

## Pastoral Care and Community Outreach

In recent years there has been a noticeable increase in active participation of the congregation in worship at the church and in taking part and organising activities which raise the profile of the church's mission in the community. One aspect of this, for example, has been holding occasional services at the Village Hall in Aston on Clun, which serves the whole parish. Members of the church have also been actively involved in a parish-led scheme set up at the beginning of lockdown to ensure that the most vulnerable parishioners had access to food and other supplies as they shielded or self-isolated.



## Forward-looking activities

Apart from paying close heed to the repair and maintenance requirements of the Quinquennial Report the PCC is keen to make improvements within and outside the church. We recently upgraded a formerly expensive and inefficient heating system and have restored running water to the church. Repairs to the roof of the lychgate have also been carried out. There are plans to make more of the space at the rear of the nave close to the entrance to the vestry for informal gatherings as well as for serving coffee and refreshments after services. One challenge in this respect is the awkward position of the Victorian font, installed in 1856, which is mostly redundant now since we brought back the original Saxon font from Bryn Church near Clun – where it spent a 100-year holiday – to its place inside the door.

Another project which is deemed increasingly necessary is the installation of a toilet for congregation and visitors. After various consultations and some research the PCC is currently evaluating the construction of an outside lavatory using a compost-based system.

# Information on The Blue Hills Federation

The Blue Hills Federation is a Voluntary Aided Federation based in South Shropshire. It was formed in September 2017 and comprises of three Church of England Schools: Clunbury CE Primary School and Newcastle CE Primary School, both in the Clun Valley Benefice and St Mary's CE Primary School, Bucknell in the Middle Marches Benefice. Clunbury and St Mary's are Voluntary Aided Schools and Newcastle is a Voluntary Controlled School. The federation is led by the Executive Head Teacher, Miss Anna Cook and supported by three Lead Teachers, one based on each site. There is one governing body for the federation consisting of foundation governors, parent governors, staff governor, local authority governor, co-opted governor, an ex-officio incumbent for Middle Marches Benefice and the ex-officio Executive Head Teacher. There are currently some vacancies for Foundation governors and an ex-officio vacancy whilst Clun Valley Benefice is in an interregnum.

The federation was formed to help sustain small Church School education in rural areas and its vision statement is influenced by Proverbs 22:6

*Teach children how they should live, and they will remember it all their lives.*

*(Good News Bible)*

*We are a caring Church Federation bringing together and serving many communities. We provide nurturing environments that facilitate learning for all. We encourage everybody to become confident, sociable and responsible citizens who achieve to the best of their ability in preparation for a fulfilling future. (Current Vision Statement taken from SIAMS SEF)*

Underpinning the federation are its values which all those involved in the federation helped to identify as important across the three schools

Friendship and Family

Love and Respect.

Thankfulness

Joy and Happiness

Perseverance and Resilience

Truth and Trust

In recent months, during the Covid-19 lockdown and re-opening of schools, the federation showed its strength and the importance of being part of such a strong team as it brought all the staff from across the three schools closer together. The values named above, have been at the forefront at this time. Our federation is like a family where friendships blossom. We show love for all those in our care and respect all those with whom we work. We have been thankful that we have stayed well and there were times of joy and happiness. We persevered and were resilient, working more hours and under different pressures, and we further built our relationships based on trust and the truth that we would get through those difficult times.

Over the three years since the federation was established, it has grown under the leadership of Miss Cook and the three schools are doing well under her direction.



