

# St Mary's Cholsey and St John the Baptist Moulsford

## BENEFICE VISION AND PROFILE

August 2022



Cholsey and Moulsford are situated in rural South Oxfordshire, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



St Mary's Cholsey



St John the Baptist Moulsoford

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## Welcome from the Bishop



*Dear potential applicants,*

*I am delighted that you are reading this profile and encourage you to pray about whether this might be the position where God is now calling you.*

*The Benefice of Cholsey with Moultsford is seeking a leader who will welcome and inspire those within its congregations and also within the wider communities. They seek someone who will be involved pastorally, with a welcoming and encouraging approach and who has experience of reaching out to children, young people and families, in particular.*

*Their next incumbent will be someone with energy and passion who is clearly present within their communities, someone who listens and is Spirit led, who catches the vision of the two churches and who will fan the flames of growth as both churches seek to flourish in God's strength.*

*You will find a friendly Deanery with supportive and experienced colleagues.*

*The benefice recognises that their churches and communities are under-represented in a number of key characteristics and would particularly welcome applications from those who would increase diversity within the benefice.*

*Please pray about whether you are the right priest to join us and if you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this important ministry position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague to partner in the gospel.*

*With every blessing,*

**Rt. Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester**

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# Introduction

Welcome to the Benefice Vision and Profile of St John the Baptist and St Mary's and thank you for your interest in exploring whether God is calling you to be our Vicar.

We are a Benefice seeking to love God and each other and influence our communities with the love of Jesus so that we might see His Kingdom come. To do this, we believe that God is calling us to Grow deeper in Faith, Grow across All Ages and Grow wider in Mission and Evangelism and in doing so to move closer together.

**Growing deeper in Faith** through our relationships with God and each other, showing unity despite our differences. We want to be adaptable and to be open to change whilst maintaining the priorities of worship, prayer, bible teaching and openness to the work of the Holy Spirit.

**Growing across All Ages** by owning and positively addressing the challenge of declining attendance in the under 40s without losing sight of the needs of our older members. As ageing congregations, we are committed to placing special emphasis on reaching children, young people and their families.

**Growing wider in Mission and Evangelism** as missional disciples, taking the good news of Jesus and his love and kingdom wherever we go throughout the week. Growing in our outreach as a church by seeking to love and serve the people in our communities and further afield.



**Growing across All Ages**

The vacancy is for the position of Vicar in the Benefice of St Mary's Cholsey and St John the Baptist, Moulsoford in the Wallingford Deanery of the Diocese of Oxford. The two villages lie in the semi-rural South Oxfordshire countryside of the Thames Valley, 16 miles to the South of Oxford and 14 miles northwest of Reading. The market town of Wallingford is 3 miles away.

Cholsey benefits from a station on the mainline into London Paddington, and the area also has excellent national road links via the A34, M4 and M40.

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# Where are we today as God's people

If you want to travel fast, travel alone;  
If you want to travel far, travel together.

## African Proverb

The Benefice of Cholsey and Moulsoford was officially formed in 2003 and consists of two parishes, St Mary's, Cholsey and St John the Baptist, Moulsoford. As a Benefice, we are still early in our journey; we have made a start and are working more closely together, but we have far to go and are still discovering what this will mean for our two churches and where our destination will be.

We are two parishes that differ in size, breadth of worship and resources, but are united in our focus to develop and strengthen our Christian commitment and support for the needs of our communities and the world beyond.

As parishes, we have travelled fast in recent years, demonstrating the joy and love of the Christian message, however, it is now felt that the Holy Spirit is guiding us to build a stronger Christian presence in our communities through a common Benefice vision.



We have made a start realising this vision, building on its established children's groups; St Mary's has started Forest Church and both Churches are working together running our new Youth Group. We are increasingly coming together as a Benefice, meeting together in Home Groups and Lent and Advent Services.

## Where we would like you to lead us

We are seeking a new Vicar who, supported by our congregations will be:

- visionary and inspiring, with excellent preaching and communication skills;
- a significant and recognised presence in our communities;
- a leader who nurtures our congregations, enabling them to become the people that God is calling them to be;
- mission minded particularly to children, young people and their families.

A leader who will inspire us; bring innovative insights into our thinking; challenge us but also be willing to be challenged; encourage us when the going gets tough and, most importantly, celebrate with us in our joy as we journey together.



## Our vision for the Benefice

We are two parishes with a desire to develop further as a Benefice and believe that by working together we can achieve much more than each church has achieved individually.

We want to travel far and together, proclaiming God's word so that Jesus may be known, and be relevant to our local congregations and the wider community. This has been the driving force in developing this vision. We wish to:

- have a Vicar who has an active presence in our local communities;
- grow as a prayerful, welcoming and inclusive Benefice that encourages its members to reach out with love and compassion, sharing the good news of the Gospel and demonstrating how Faith and Christian Values are still relevant today;
- cultivate and cherish the talents we have received from God, especially those of the younger members of our churches, so we can transform our communities and make new disciples;
- be a living expression of faith and worship in practice: whilst appreciating our heritage and recognising the potential to explore, develop and embed new worship patterns relevant to the challenges of modern life.

It is our hope and prayer that our new Vicar will hear God's voice in leading us, and that together we can further develop and fulfil this vision.

# What are our challenges?

We know that we will face many challenges on this journey, we need to:

make apparent to our two congregations the benefits of the Benefice rather than individual parishes in furthering the Kingdom of God;

increase the under 40s age group within our Christian fellowship and church community;

bring to our local communities a knowledge of our loving God and living faith;

provide support for our church families who have teenagers, helping them to maintain a Christian focus in their young peoples' lives;

recognise we are small congregations in relation to the numbers of projects we take on, meaning we cannot always find capacity for new things;

acknowledge a wider reluctance, not just confined to members of our congregations, to take on leadership roles.

## As our vicar how can you lead us on this journey?

We have outlined earlier a few of the things we are busy doing today. We also have many ideas and a heartfelt passion that Jesus may be known, but we don't have all the answers and can't do this alone. Our Benefice Vision is challenging and if it is to be realised, we will need to be guided and encouraged by a Visionary Leader with a strong Missionary commitment who is able to:

- inspire, motivate and draw us closer together in sharing the love of God and proclaiming the gospel of new life in Jesus Christ to the communities in which we live and serve;
- train and further develop those already involved in front line ministries within our churches and encourage all to fully participate as members of the body of Christ;
- share our vision and be an effective communicator of it within our congregations and the wider community;
- encourage and be active with us, in our work with all-age groups, particularly with young families, and our local schools;
- nurture what is good within our vision, bring their own ideas and not to be afraid of challenging less effective initiatives.

## We can offer you:

✓ The opportunity to lead us in carrying forward our Benefice Vision and to be with us on this exciting journey as we **Grow deeper in Faith, Grow across All Ages and Grow wider in Mission and Evangelism;**

✓ the whole hearted support of two prayerful and welcoming church communities;

✓ the chance to lead a Christian community eager to make Christ known in its wider community;

✓ the support of strong lay assistance and committed PCC's;

✓ sound finances, well maintained church buildings and part-time paid administrative support.



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# St Mary's today



At St Mary's, our aim is a longing "to make Jesus known" in our church and in our community, and we look forward to welcoming a leader who will, with God's help, unite us in that mission.

As we continue to come to terms with the impact of Covid and the current financial challenges, we need to focus on Jesus who brings hope and a higher perspective to our lives. We need to be brave as we seek to involve the wider congregation in the whole life of the church.

As a church, we face many challenges and recognise our vulnerabilities, we:

- are an ageing congregation. Whilst the village population has grown significantly within the younger age ranges this is not reflected in St Mary's;
- are leading increasingly busy lives which can mean we lack volunteers to help with the work of the church;

- may be comfortable where we are and be reluctant to change;
- struggle connecting with the village in our increasingly secular society;
- have the asset of a village hall, but recognise that it needs to be redeveloped to better meet our needs and those of all its users.

We have already made a start on this journey, we:

- have secured funding for a Family Worker and are building on our existing Kids Club and Little Fishes toddler groups, we work with Cholsey Primary School in leading Open the Book assemblies, and having recently started Forest Church and Youth Group;

- are looking at how to bring St Mary's back into the heart of the village, and over recent years have annually performed an open-air Living Nativity production for the whole village to enjoy;
- actively support Christians Against Poverty (CAP) and the work of its Debt Centre to free those from the burden of debt and share Christ's love for them;
- have started the process to raise the funding needed to realise our vision for a redeveloped village hall.

### Worship at St Mary's

The main Parish Service is at 9:45 am every Sunday and is also available on line via Zoom for those who are unable to worship in person.

This is a relaxed and welcoming service, that typically has a congregation of around 50 adults and up to 10 children attending in person and 10-15 joining online. It includes a variety of both traditional hymns and more modern songs that are celebrated with St Mary's music group.

For up to three Sundays every month, this is in the form of a **Parish Communion** service; once a month a **Morning Worship** service that may include a visiting preacher from one of our Mission Partners or a member of the congregation sharing a personal testimony; and for the first Sunday of the month a **"Family Feast" all age** service. The 9:45 service also offers a chance to catch up for fellowship with friends, either in an on-line Zoom breakout room or over coffee and biscuits in Church.

St Mary's also holds a smaller, traditional **Holy Communion** service once a month at 8:00 am, **Morning Payer** every weekday at 7:15 am and most Sundays there is also an online **prayer meeting** at 6:00pm.

As a congregation, we are also open to experiment with different styles of service and have over the years put on a variety of

less traditional services, such as the **Living Nativity** which creates the opportunity for the wider congregation to work together and dramatically brings the Christmas story on a journey through the centre of the village.

Other examples of this include; making last year's **Carol Service** accessible to the Village by holding it outside and online; and our recent open-air service that formed an integral part of the Villages Platinum Jubilee celebrations.

Once a month, we have **Sanctuary on Sunday**. This is a very simple, meditative service in the peaceful setting of St Mary's that will start with gentle sitar music, followed by periods of meditation, prayer and a time of silence.

### Children, youth and family groups

The ministry to families, children and the youth of our villages is an area of passion across the whole Benefice, built on our heartfelt desire that Jesus may be known amongst more families in our villages. The development of this mission forms an integral part of both St Mary's and the Benefice's future vision. Having secured funding, we are now in the process of recruiting a part time Families' Worker. St Mary's currently runs and supports a number of groups and activities, including:

**All Age Kids Club**, a long-established group who meet each Sunday during the main service when there is no Family Feast or Forest Church. Kids Club is aimed at the under 11's, but open to all, and will regularly have 7 or 8 children join to share Bible stories, songs, games and crafts.

On the first Sunday of the Month, we hold a **Family Feast all-age service** in church. Pre-Covid, these were a cafe style service and whether meeting in person or on-line commonly feature an appearance from St Mary's Puppets.



**Top left:** Easter Service 2022; **Top right:** Living Nativity 2021; **Middle left:** Carol Service 2021; **Middle right:** Cafe Style Family Service; **Bottom:** St Mary's Puppets at the Platinum Jubilee Service on the Village Recreation ground



**Forest Church**



**Little Fishes**

In the last year we have started running, once a month, **Forest Church**. The aim of Forest Church is for children (and often their parents) to be outside as much as possible participating in new and different ways of worship and getting to know more about nature and God's creation. Forest Church provides everything that you would expect from a Forest School (including camp fires, cooking and crafts) all firmly centred around a Bible theme.

We typically have 25 children and 15 adults; who do not regularly attend St Mary's but join us at Forest Church; and it is proving to be a wonderful opportunity to build relationships with the children and adults.

**Little Fishes** is a group that caters from bumps to pre-schoolers and regularly has 12-14 adults and 12-18 children coming to a session on a Tuesday morning. Little Fishes has been running for many years and is a great place for parents, grandparents and carers to meet and chat in a safe and friendly environment, whilst children play and have fun. In particular, Little Fishes is somewhere where strong friendships across all ages are built over cups of coffee or at the craft table, and for those who wish, have a chance for prayer or to talk and share information about baptism, weddings or church services.

St Mary's, with help from St John's, has recently started a twice monthly Sunday evening **Youth Group**, where children aged 9+ and teenagers meet up, bring friends and have fun taking part in activities like indoor hockey and table tennis, enjoy a hot chocolate and doughnut, and have conversations and a Bible themed talk. The group is growing in numbers and we now regularly have 15+ attending, many of whom are not church goers.

As part of **Open the Book**, a team from St Mary's either visit (or during lockdown shared a special Zoom recording) Cholsey Primary School five or six times a term to act out Bible Stories in assemblies.





As a Benefice, St Mary's and St John the Baptist are also in partnership

with the 3rd Wallingford (Cholsey) **Boys Brigade and Girls Association** group who meet up at St Mary's every Tuesday evening. As Vicar, you will be our ex officio Chaplain.

### Fellowship and other groups

One of the strengths of St Mary's is the number of small groups that regularly meet for fellowship, prayer, support, encouragement and fun together.

There are currently 5 Home Groups; these are small informal groups that meet at various homes at different times and are centred around a Bible study.



The **133 group** also meet fortnightly and is a place where women of all ages can meet together (with pre-school children) for discussion and fellowship.

The **Pastoral Care** team regularly visit those who are unable to join us in person, often giving small gifts of a plant to those who have been bereaved, are elderly or have not been well for some time.

**Alpha courses** are run most years and this year we are part of a joint Alpha with Ridgeway Community Church in Wallingford and Wallingford Baptist Church.

St Mary's **PCC** meet on a monthly basis and currently has no vacancies, during the interregnum we have also formed a **Steering Committee** to support the Church Wardens and Assistant Church Warden.

We have also recently formed a **Green Group** as we seek to become a "green" church.

St Mary's has a dedicated band of **Bell Ringers** who meet each week to practise ringing its 8 bells, and on Sundays to welcome those attending the 9:45 service.

## Partners and other external links

christians  
against  
poverty

CAP

### Christians Against Poverty

St Mary's is one of 6 local Churches who, in partnership together, run the **Didcot and Wallingford Area**

**CAP Debt Centre.** CAP (Christians Against Poverty) is an award-winning charity that transforms lives through free, face-to-face debt counselling and sharing the hope of Jesus. St Mary's supports the debt centre both financially and practically, with members of the congregation active in supporting the debt coaches in client visits, befriending and welcoming clients to St Mary's, and as charity trustees. The Vicar will also be an ex officio charity trustee of the debt centre. In 2021, St Mary's gave £6,000 to support debt centre's running.

### Cholsey community tea shop

As part of our outreach into the community, we are one of 7 village organisations who, on a rota, volunteer to serve tea, coffee and homemade cakes on a Saturday morning in the Pavilion, the central community hub for the village.

The Tea Shop provides a fantastic opportunity to raise the profile of St Mary's and to engage with a range of people from the village, including parents of young children and older villagers.

## Mission partners

St Mary's is also active in supporting both its local community and other mission partners. We currently support 3 charities abroad that have strong links to our church:

GoMAD in Tanzania: whose founders Graham and Irene are active members of St Mary's

Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF)

Arocha International

And 3 charities in this country, again with strong links to St Mary's:

Adventure Plus near Witney

The Message in Manchester and London

Wednesday Church set up in Didcot to support people with learning disabilities

St Mary's is committed to giving 10% of its regular income to our mission partners and last year we gave over £7250, to these causes.

**GO MAKE A  
DIFFERENCE**  
IN TANZANIA

**MAF**  
Flying for Life

**A**  **ROCHA**  
Conservation and Hope

**A+** **Adventure Plus**  
inspiring the next generation

**the message**



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# St John the Baptist today



Our aim is to be a Christ-like church, empowered by God's word, thoughtful in prayer and renewed by God's Spirit. We seek to be alive to the challenges of 21st century life and to reach out effectively to our community.

Our purpose is to join with God in creating a caring, sustainable and growing Christian presence in Moulsoford, enabling every person in our community to live and share the love of God as seen in the life of Jesus Christ.

We are a small worshipping community and many of our members are active in a variety of ways in our church life. Church members are predominately middle aged and older. They come from many different Christian traditions and denominations as we are the only church in the parish. Our worship and style of services is inclusive, flexible, prayerful and, it is felt, reflect the diverse needs of our worshipping

community. We are, however, conscious that there is a need to reach out more effectively to the wider community and this must be a priority in looking forward.

We believe that every member of the church has a part to play within the body of Christ and a responsibility to use their God-given gifts to serve the church and community. There is a strong volunteer culture; we have a team of lay and clergy service leaders who help to run our services, an active PCC which meets six times a year, a Leadership Team usually meeting monthly and volunteer administrators. Other members of the congregation also contribute

to many practical aspects of church life such as ringing the bells, organising music, cleaning the church, and serving refreshments. We are blessed to have so many willing volunteers from the wider village community who wish to ensure a well-maintained spiritual centre for the village. We are, however, aware of the danger that small groups, especially with an older age profile, can become reliant on a few key leaders and we recognise this is a significant challenge.

Most church members live in the parish itself with a small number joining us from surrounding villages. We have a small turnover of people as families move away and others join us. Our electoral roll has been steady at around 30 for several years. We are able to sustain our worship pattern through the use of retired clergy, lay members of the congregation, plus a team of readers and intercessors.

A survey we conducted recently with our congregation and in the wider village community, endorsed by the Parochial Church Council, identified our key strengths as:

- a warm, welcoming, and hospitable congregation with a strong sense of purpose;
- using a diverse liturgy and music in our worship;
- a congregation engaged and active in church life;
- a congregation willing to finance mission.

## Worship

Corporate worship is an important part of our church family life, with a rotating pattern of morning services each Sunday. Within a traditional Anglican framework, we endeavour to make worship exciting, thoughtful and relevant. The monthly pattern of services was sustained during the pandemic in accordance with national guidelines. In 2021 our average congregation was marginally up on the previous year. We have to recognise that the concept of a collective 'day of rest' may not be seen as relevant by the wider community and therefore new patterns of worship will need to emerge.

Particularly successful have been the 'Faith

## Sunday Morning at 09:30

(Average attendance 14 people)

- |     |   |
|-----|---|
| 1st | Family Communion<br>Common Worship Order 1 (contemporary), Order 2 (Traditional) after Benefice Service |
| 2nd | Faith Explored<br>Breakfast beforehand from 08:45<br>Guest speaker                                      |
| 3rd | Family Communion<br>Common Worship Order One (contemporary)   |
| 4th | Morning Praise (Laity Led)  |
| 5th | Benefice Joint Service  |

Explored' services which have explored a wide range of challenging subjects and in some cases have led to follow-on action. For a number of years during Lent and Advent we have an early morning service of reflection and communion followed by breakfast. Members from across the Benefice find these services to be a useful additional preparation for the Festivals of Easter and Christmas. Each day a short Morning service is sent to our congregation and to our Partnership church in Huhudi, South Africa. We hold visitor orientated services such as Creationtide / Harvest Sunday, Remembrance, and Carols by Candlelight.

During 2021 it was with great joy that we had two weddings after a very fallow period. There are usually four or five funerals each year, which given the age profile is not exceptional. Equally, given that most new residents moving into the village already have established families, we should not be too concerned that it is some time since we had a baptism.

We also help with courses for seekers and those wanting to revisit faith issues organised on a Benefice wide basis. We offer a range of opportunities, both as regular and one-off events, for those outside of the church family to be drawn in and included.





**Top left:** Creationtide; **Top right:** Moulsoford Faith Explored; **Middle left:** The bride arrives; **Middle right:** Remembrance; **Bottom left:** Volunteers; **Bottom right:** Congregation

## Children's, youth and family groups

Work with young families is a major weakness in parish activity. There is no consensus as yet on how best we should move forward, although we have been building modest reserves to support this activity. The current proposed project for our sister church to employ a Family Worker is supported in principle.

Until five years ago our work with young people was quite strong and specifically linked to Sunday Worship being led by an enthusiastic laity team, with clergy support. Following the confirmation of three young people from church families this was replaced by a Messy Church initiative which fell away and was ended because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are signs that new growth may be possible through working more closely with our sister church. This is limited at present to adult involvement but there is a new sense of discipleship and confidence emerging. Over the past year there has been increasing laity contact with the two Independent Schools in the village and we have been encouraged by the positive response from key members of staff. One of the schools has linked with an inclusive special needs school in South Africa as part of our Huhudi Partnership's outreach work. Both schools are increasingly using the church for worship and as a teaching resource. We anticipate that this will be a significant developmental area in 2022. Our PCC have closely engaged with the initiative to re-establish

a strong Boys' Brigade and Girls Association and other youth developments at St Mary's, Cholsey.

## Fellowship

### Our prayer life

Prayer is important to us as a church family though there is scope for further development. We encourage people to pray in their homes and produce a morning service each day using the 'Reflections for Daily Prayer' publication which is circulated by Zoom, WhatsApp and hard copy. This initiative, begun at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, has been sustained in both Moulsoford and our Partnership in South Africa. At the moment, numbers are still small, but we pray constantly that the Holy Spirit would speak to more members of our own congregation in this way.

We have participated in the national 'Thy Kingdom Come' week of prayer for several years now, setting up prayer stations around the church to encourage prayer. Our Partner church in South Africa has joined us in this activity. In addition, an early morning service of prayer has been held in church. A booklet is produced each year and is included in the Mission Section of the church website [www.moulsofordparishchurch.blogspot.com](http://www.moulsofordparishchurch.blogspot.com). The deepening of our Prayer Life is vital to realising our vision for the future. We look forward to our new vicar guiding us in developing this aspect of our Christian life.



Harvest workshop



Creation time bug hunt

Without committed clergy participation it has proved challenging to sustain homegroups within our congregation on a long term basis. In recent years however the Holy Spirit has been active amongst us, and new growth can be discerned through our linking and contributing to two existing homegroups in Cholsey. Homegroups are places for sharing life, Bible study, mutual encouragement, support, and prayer. The study programmes which the groups are encouraged to follow are suggested by our Vicar and usually relate to a Sunday morning preaching series. This does present issues given the clergy rota for Moulsoford. Homegroups may offer opportunities for the developing of alternative forms of worship in the future which meet the needs of busy families.

### Partners and other external links

We believe that mission is something we are all called to, at home as well as abroad. We seek to reach out to those directly around us through caring for our community as already outlined.

A commitment to spreading the Gospel, serving the needy and fighting injustice lies close to our heart. We have demonstrated this through our long-term relationship (initiated in 2007 and formally established in 2010) with St Phillip the Apostle Church in Huhudi, South Africa: an urban Township of around 46,000 adjoining Vryburg on the edge of the Kalahari Desert. Over the past decade this parish- to- parish link has grown into an equal Partnership under the banner of 'Feed my Sheep' and has moved from a financial focus to one which places prayer and worship as its key priority.

Our ministry to the residents of the care home in the village is strong and members of the congregation and clergy maintain a spiritual presence using their Chapel for weekly worship. Non eucharist services and support continued during the pandemic.

We actively try to live our Christian calling to 'love your neighbour' and members of our church community are seen to be a reliable support for those in need of comfort or those in distress, the aged, the infirmed, and younger



**Top:** Home group; **Middle:** Partnership Tree - Huhdi; **Bottom:** Partnership Tree - Moulsoford;

families Whilst it is encouraging that our pastoral care is seen to be a great strength by our village community, and wherever possible we attempt to use our limited skills to promote the 'Gospel', we are acutely aware that it also presents a missed opportunity for more overtly spreading the joy of knowing Christ.

We have established a working relationship with the Village Events Committee and together have organised a Village Carol Event, taken responsibility for a Friday Night Social in the Pavilion, which often has a clergy presence, and have run a highly successful Tearfund Big Quiz nights. There is wide support for Tearfund activities across our community.

In support of our local community, we have a commitment to provide a volunteer driver for our local Bus Service without which the village would have no public transport facility.

We believe that as God's people we have a responsibility to model sustainable living. We are conscious about our carbon footprint and attempt to be socially, ethically, and environmentally responsible in our use of resources. We would wish to continue to develop our response to the care of the world.

### Final word

We think Moulsoford is a very supportive community. Of course, there are challenges for the church and our response is not always as dynamic as we would wish. We are keen for our new Vicar to be our 'Shepherd': to challenge us and encourage us to think 'outside the box'. As a small Christian congregation in a village setting, we believe that we do make a difference. Despite our faults and failings there is a lot going on and we believe that the Holy Spirit is continually at work through us.



**Top:** Harvest Supper Barn Dance; **Bottom left:** Churchyard wild flower area;  
**Bottom right:** Thy Kingdom Come Prayer Wall

# Deanery perspective



St Mary's Cholsey and St John the Baptist, Moulsoford are part of Wallingford Deanery in the Diocese of Oxford. We believe the deanery is an exciting place to be with a rapidly increasing population and a mix of rural and town life.



There are great opportunities for outreach initiatives with the potential to evolve new worshipping communities. We currently have 19 churches and 9 stipendiary clergy (including a new communities missionary) serving alongside a house-for-duty priest and lay, self-supporting and retired ministers. The deanery is one of 11 deaneries in the Archdeaconry of Dorchester which covers most of the county of Oxfordshire, apart from the city of Oxford itself.

Member churches in Wallingford Deanery have collectively developed a Mission Action Plan which identifies some of our shared priorities:

- Ministry to children, young people and families
- Outreach to new and settled communities
- Appropriate patterns of worship
- Ministry in the Greater Didcot area which is set to again double in numbers through new housing over the next 10-15 years.

The Deanery aims to support mission and ministry across the area, facilitating thought-provoking thoughts, seminars and workshops, inviting experienced external practitioners to speak on topics and present case studies in the areas of our shared priorities. These are offered through the regular Synod and Clergy Chapter meetings. Mutual support through sharing, prayer and Bible reflection is important to us.

In common with deaneries across the Diocese, Wallingford Deanery Synod has a designated role of allocating parish share to the Benefices, bringing local knowledge to the Diocese. The Diocese makes available grants to deaneries and churches from the Common Development Fund to assist in mission projects across the Deanery, with an ecumenical youth & children's project resulting in the founding of a Christian Children and Youthwork Trust working across Greater Didcot having benefitted from these most recently. We encourage such shared visions of mission and the lived presence of Jesus in each local area.

We look forward to welcoming the new minister as they encourage the churches in Cholsey and Moulsoford to grow deeper in their faith and share the love of Jesus in their communities. The churches are different but each have many gifts to offer and a shared passion to connect with local people.

**Area Dean:** Revd Dr Andy Lord

**Lay Chair:** Gordon Gill

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# Properties in the Benefice

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## The Vicarage

The Vicarage is located in Cholsey on Church Road, close to the centre of the village and was built in the early 1990's. It has been upgraded during the interregnum by the Diocese, including the installation of a new fitted kitchen and bathrooms.

The accommodation includes: entrance hall, study, sitting room leading to the rear garden, cloakroom WC, dining room, newly fitted kitchen, newly fitted utility room, 4 bedrooms, shower room and bathroom, garage and driveway parking.



## St Mary's Church building

Christians have been worshipping in Cholsey for more than a thousand years, with the church founded in 986. Over the centuries, St Mary's church building has been modified to meet the needs of the day. Most recently, in the 1990's, a reordering was carried out which has made the church a versatile, warm and welcoming space for different kinds of worship without losing the essential character of a village church.

The reordering enables the building to be a vibrant centre of worship and mission. The level wooden floor and the chairs, means the space is accessible and has enormous flexibility for a whole range of services of worship, for concerts, for Christian theatre, for quiet prayer, for workshops and other special events such as Alpha suppers. St Mary's building really expresses the life of the Christian community, as well as being a wonderful asset for the wider parish and a witness to the glorious fact that after more than a thousand years, God is alive and well in Cholsey!

During the Covid 19 pandemic, services and other church activities moved online, with new AV equipment and broadband installed in the church, enabling services to be broadcast to those unable to attend in person.

For its age, the church is in a good state of repair. Regular Quinquennial reviews are carried out and repairs attended to as necessary. St Mary's is also fortunate in being supported by 'The Friends of Cholsey Church' who were formed over 50 years ago, with the aim of supporting St Mary's Cholsey with the upkeep of the fabric of the Church and promoting the use of the Church. The sums given over the last 50 years amount to £500,000 in today's money and hence the building is well cared for by the PCC and the Friends.



**A light in the darkness**

## St John the Baptist Church building

St John's provides a safe, quiet, and well-maintained spiritual space in the village, both for those with a 'faith' and those still seeking one and this is greatly valued by the village community.

There has been a church building on the current site since the early 13th Century. The current building, dedicated to St John the Baptist in 1847, is a fairly typical small rural church which was rebuilt in the mid-1880s. The materials used in its

construction came from the previous church on the site which was in a very poor state of repair. The church is approached along a tree-lined drive off the main Wallingford to Streatley road.

The building is well maintained both internally and externally. It has modern electric under-pew heaters, LED lighting, toilet facilities and is accessible by wheel chair. The 2012 re-ordering and renovation enabled an open space to be created in the north aisle which is used for parish breakfast; tea/coffee after services and for weekday services. The church will seat about 100 people. Outside, the churchyard is maintained to a high standard by a team of volunteers. Quinquennial inspections are carried out as per schedule and all issues highlighted in the report are addressed before the following inspection, the next of which is due in 2024.

## The Laurence Hall

The Laurence Hall is located in the centre of Cholsey and is used extensively by a variety of village and church groups during the week. It is also hired out for parties, celebrations, and events run for the whole village community, including the annual Beer Festival in support of the village run charity - CHOKO.

The Laurence Hall includes a main hall (that can accommodate up to 120 people), kitchen and toilet areas, and an extensive enclosed garden laid to grass. It also houses the church office where St Mary's church administrator is based.

The hall building has been a part of Cholsey village life for nearly a century, and is now at the point that it is in need of significant repair and upgrade. Following consultation with the congregation and village there are plans to replace the current building with a new "modular build" hall. A small team are now focused on securing grants and raising the funding required.





## The church bungalow

The Church Bungalow is located in the car park of St Mary's and was the original village school. Over the years, this building has been used for a number of purposes, including being the home of St Mary's Sunday School and Youth Groups prior to the Church's reordering in the 1990's. The bungalow is (and has been for a number of years) let as a residential property.

The deeds of both the Laurence Hall and Church Bungalow are held by the Diocesan Trustee (Oxford) Ltd. The vicar and church wardens have responsibility for their day-to-day management and St Mary's benefits from the income generated by both properties.

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## Cholsey, Moulsoford and the local area



### Cholsey

Cholsey is a lively and friendly village 2 miles south of Wallingford in South Oxfordshire. The village is situated in beautiful farming country close to the river Thames, with the ancient Ridgeway path nearby as well as the Chiltern hills. A main claim to fame is that Agatha Christie lived in the parish for many years - she is buried in St Mary's churchyard - and this regularly brings visitors to the village and the churchyard.

The 2011 census records the parish population as around 3,500 but the village has grown substantially in the last 10 years, including 3 fairly large housing developments and a number of smaller in-fill developments, and the current population is estimated at 4,500. The population is diverse in terms of socio-economic status and age. With a train station on the main line between Didcot and Reading, many people in the village commute to work in Reading (20 minutes), Oxford (35 minutes) and London (an hour away).





**Agatha Christie's gravestone, St Mary's**

The village is popular with young families and has a strong community spirit, with over 50 clubs and societies noted in the annual list compiled for the village magazine. These range from the Cholsey Volunteers, who support the elderly and vulnerable with hot food deliveries, a food bank, befriending and driving services, sports clubs for all ages, scouts, guides, cubs and brownies, and musical groups such as the Cholsey Silver Band.

Cholsey Day Centre serves the village and wider area, providing the over 50's with a safe and stimulating environment for people to visit with activities and lunch.

Annual events such as May Day and the summer Flower Show bring the whole village together. The village has a tradition of community fund-raising, including the CHOKO project, set up in Cholsey as a community linking project, with the aim of raising funds for disadvantaged families in the Kodumela region of South Africa. CHOKO is now supporting GoMAD in Tanzania and a number of our congregation are very involved in this project.

The village has a small supermarket (which hosts a Post Office), two pubs, a pharmacy, a butcher's shop, a Chinese restaurant, an Indian restaurant, two cafes, a barber's and two ladies' hairdressers. In the modern and well-equipped village hall there is a Community Library run

by volunteers, and on Saturday mornings a volunteer-run tea shop welcomes young and old. St Mary's is part of the organisation of this.

Nearby, Wallingford and Didcot have a large variety of shops and facilities including supermarkets, cinema, theatres, banks. Reading and Oxford are easily accessible by road, rail and bus.

Challenges within the village are that it is growing in population fast without a concurrent growth in infrastructure. For example, there is no Doctors' Surgery in Cholsey, and only one state primary school, which has already expanded twice in the last 10 years. Facilities and support for those in need are limited, other than those provided by volunteers. In particular, the population has grown significantly within the 40 and below age range but this is not mirrored in the St Mary's congregation profile. This is one of the main reasons behind our recent decision to employ a families' worker.

## **Moulsford**

Moulsford is a very comfortable, ancient, small village in South Oxfordshire (4.5 miles south of Wallingford and 2 miles from Cholsey). It has a modern Pavilion (Village Hall), a riverside restaurant (The Beetle and Wedge), and there is a garage with an excellent Morrison's Local just outside the village.

The village is unusual in that, within the local development plan, there are no proposals for new housing developments, therefore the population numbers are relatively stable. The 2018 census records a population of 544 people (589 in 2011) living in 194 houses and is overwhelmingly of white ethnicity. The statistics mask the significant change in the character of the village since WWII. The post-war development of social housing followed by modest owner-occupied homes led to a largely stable, locally employed population. Increasingly, this has been replaced by more affluent and mobile family groups with often both parents working extended hours. New village members are frequently attracted by the two good independent schools, the rail links at Cholsey



and Goring and the lack of proposed housing development which has accelerated house prices. As a consequence, community social activities, clubs and young people's activities have suffered, as has any natural link to the Church.

One advantage of our link with St Mary's, Cholsey is that, as a Benefice, we have the opportunity to overcome some of these issues. When necessary, the village communities do work effectively together, as illustrated by the rapidly established, excellent Covid-19 support network in which church members took an active role.

### Local schools

The Benefice has a wide variety of local nursery, primary, secondary and independent schools within its boundaries or within close travelling distance.

### There are a number of pre-schools and nurseries, including:

**Cholsey pre-School:** located at Cholsey Primary School, for children aged 3 to 5 years and rated Outstanding by Ofsted

**Bright Horizons Mongewell Park Day Nursery:** for children aged from 3 months to 5 years and rated Good by Ofsted

### In Cholsey, there are two Primary Schools:

**Cholsey Primary School** with 315 places and rated Good by Ofsted

**The Treehouse School**, a small independent primary school with 15 places

Local children also attend a number of state primary schools in adjacent villages.

### The state secondary schools in the area include:

**Wallingford School and Sixth Form**, rated as Good by Ofsted is 3 miles from Cholsey, with transport provided to those living in the village

**Didcot Girls' School**, rated Outstanding by Ofsted is 5 miles from Cholsey and accessible by train

**St Birinus School for Boys**, rated as a good school in its Ofsted short inspection is also located in Didcot

**Didcot 6th Form** is combined from Didcot Girls and St Birinus schools and was also included as part of the St Birinus Ofsted inspection

**Aureus School**, Didcot is a co-educational school recently opened in the new Great Western Park, Didcot for ages 11-16

**Didcot University Technical College (UTC)**, for ages 14-19 offering specialist programmes alongside a core curriculum, rated Good by Ofsted

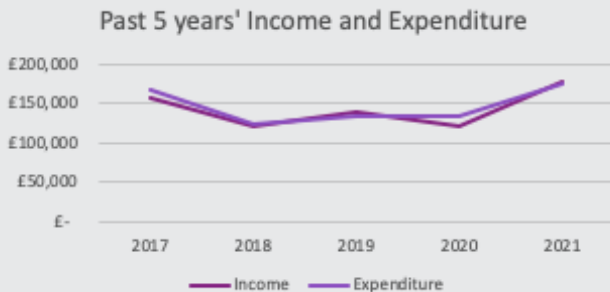
There are also two independent schools in Moulsoford that St John's work closely with; **Moulsoford Preparatory School** for boys aged 4 to 13 and **Cranford House School**, a co-educational school for children aged 3-18.



# Additional information and data

## St Mary's

### Finances

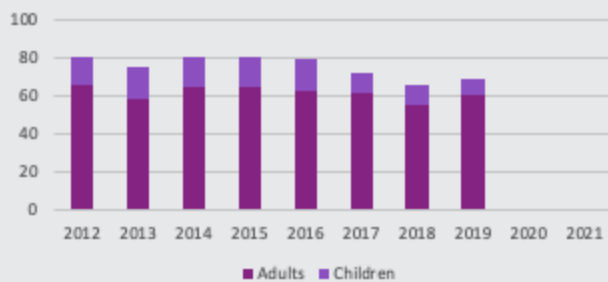


The following is a summary of the St Mary's income and expenditure for the past 5 years. Points of note include:

- St Mary's has been able to pay its Parish Share in full;
- our income and giving closely match our expenditure;
- this period has included significant repairs to the Church building that were recommended in the last quinquennial report and were funded in part thanks to the generous support of the Friends of Cholsey Church;
- there are no immediate financial issues, although fundraising for the redevelopment of the Laurence Hall is a significant challenge.

Full copies of the accounts available on the Charity Commission website (charity number 1138273).

### Average Sunday church attendance



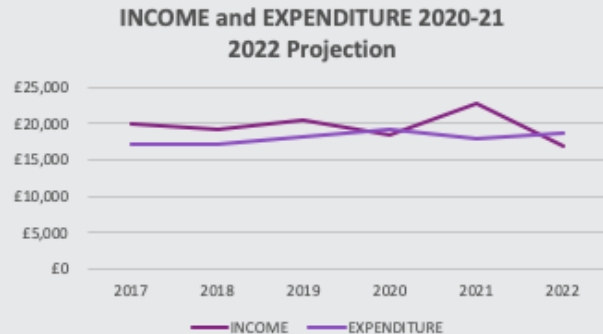
St Mary's services switched to being either solely online or a hybrid mix of being in person and online during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, with at its peak 40-50 separate logins (with many being couples) regularly attending the main 9:45 service online.

Services have continued in a hybrid form with approximately 50 adults and 5 - 10 children regularly attending in person with 10 - 15 adults joining online through Zoom.

St Mary's currently has 110 registered on its electoral roll.

## St John the Baptist

### Finances



The above chart outlines the St John the Baptist's Income and Expenditure over a five-year period. The profile for 2021 shows a substantial surplus mainly due to unanticipated income from 'additional' services, VAT recovery and an insurance claim. The projected deficit for 2022 is based on an unlikely worst-case scenario and a break-even outcome is anticipated by the end of the year. It is most encouraging that income from 'giving' closely matches day to day expenditure.

We are keen to encourage church members in their Christian discipleship of giving. We see our sound administrative and financial arrangements as 'enablers' and not an 'end in themselves'. However, given our congregation numbers, we are alert that a minor change in the core congregation could have very significant impact on the ability to sustain a 'spiritual' centre.

The financial statement of accounts for 2021 can be found on our website under the 'Annual Report' tab. There are no immediate financial issues and it has been possible to increase the reserves by a small amount each year. Our guiding financial principles are:

- The agreed Parish Share should be paid in full;
- 10% of income should be set aside for Mission activity: 5% for Huhudi, South Africa and 5% for home mission (this currently being accumulated to fund a family worker);
- The income from 'planned giving' and 'other' giving, particularly the generous activities of the growing volunteer churchyard and maintenance teams, should cover the annual 'day to day' expenditure. In 2021 we achieved 97.66%.

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# Do you feel the Lord is calling you to join us and help us?

After prayer and reflection, do you hear God's call to be our Benefice's Vicar and be our spiritual guide in the challenge of realising our vision?

Our websites [stmaryscholsey.org](http://stmaryscholsey.org) and [moulsfordparishchurch.blogspot.com](http://moulsfordparishchurch.blogspot.com) include more detailed information about our parishes and activities, and greater insights into our thinking and ambitions.

If you still feel that our Benefice is where you are being called to serve then why not drop round and visit or worship with us.

## Our Churchwardens:

### CHOLSEY

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