BENEFICE PROFILE

## PRIEST IN CHARGE

Shiplake
with
Dunsden
and
Harpsdencum-Bolney







## Forward by the Bishop

#### **Dear potential applicants**

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

We are looking to appoint a full-time stipendiary interim priest-in-charge, initially for three years, to the benefice of Shiplake with Dunsden and Harpsden-cum-Bolney.

These three churches in rural South Oxfordshire offer a truly wonderful ministry for a wise and community minded priest.

The focus of the next three years will be to continue the work of building up engagement with the community, developing initiatives to grow the church and establishing a more secure financial base.

An appreciation and understanding of rural life is essential (this is, after all, an area of outstanding natural beauty!) but you'll also be blessed with excellent local amenities and cultural life. The beautiful market town of Henley is nearby and it's only 25 minutes by train to London.

As you read on, you'll see that the people of the benefice are deeply committed to their parishes. They care about their buildings and using them for mission. They are highly creative and not afraid of new initiatives and projects as they seek to reach out to all ages of their communities through the offering of worship, as well as through acts of service. It's quite clear that each parish has something special about it.

Here is a strong team of both ordained and lay leaders waiting to work together with a new priest to meet the many opportunities that there are. If you are someone with a deep faith, with a love for all God's people, and someone who can help clarify and shape a vision, then this could be the perfect role for you. Please also note that there's a commitment too that your wellbeing will be of paramount importance!

You will find a friendly deanery with supportive and experienced colleagues. Our episcopal area and diocese are in good heart, expectant for all that God will do and thankful for all that God is doing.

Please pray about whether you might be the right minister to join us. If you decide to apply, I would be delighted to receive your application for this key position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague to partner in the Gospel

With every blessing



The Rt Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

+ Gavin Dorchester

### Welcome

Thank you for taking time to read about this position. It is a post for someone with vision, energy and enthusiasm. Our special Benefice comprises three beautiful village churches at the edge of the Chilterns.

Over recent years our three congregations have 'grown and evolved' in coming together to support each other. We truly do think of each other as Church Family.

The parish rolls, at Shiplake-with-Dunsden in particular, are aging and we would welcome someone with new ideas to further mission and outreach to serve the needs of new congregations, especially young families.

Our previous Rector left the churches' fabric in excellent order and, as noted in the individual church descriptions which follow, all three churches are in the early stages of preparing for building projects which will, we expect, support mission and outreach.

The Benefice also has a nationally recognised Ringing Centre at St Peter & St Paul's.

## Setting

Close to the River Thames, our Benefice lies in an AONB. There are excellent transport links, schools, hospitals and community facilities. Reading is 15 minutes away and London 25 minutes by train.

We are fortunate to have the best of both worlds, with the ability to enjoy the beautiful surrounding countryside alongside all the amenities of large towns within easy reach.

Henley-on-Thames, as the nearest town to us, hosts the internationally renowned annual rowing Regatta. This beautiful market town has a lively cultural life with well supported musical, literary, art and dramatic activities throughout the year. The Kenton Theatre is thought to be the fourth oldest theatre in England and has an exciting and varied programme. The annual Wargrave and Shiplake Regatta takes place at Shiplake and is the third largest regatta on the Thames.

The RG9 postcode area is a high-income area with high house prices and an above average number of older affluent professionals. Many work in managerial and professional jobs with the number educated to degree level being well above the national average. In our Benefice, there is a high proportion of retired individuals. There are residents in the area who are on lower incomes or financially dependent on State Benefits. Various support agencies are available.



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## Our vision

## In our next Priest we are looking for someone who will:

- evidence a deep faith, rooted in regular personal prayer which then shapes public worship and lifestyle
- focus on ministry demonstrating wisdom and gentleness, as well as clarity and vision, to people of all ages
- serve the needs of younger people and families to worship in our churches by introducing new initiatives
- be a Team worker with the ability to work alongside those within our Benefice and the Diocese
- have a willingness to engage with, and be part of, the local community
- enjoy working with our Primary School and Shiplake College
- strive to be eco-minded with resources by reducing energy consumption and adopting sustainable practices
- develop and encourage community use of beautiful buildings which may translate into attendance at services
- have a STOP button! The scope of this job is limitless!

We have tried to give an overview of the whole Benefice in our profile and the support that you can expect. While there are challenges, there is also a myriad of opportunities for an enthusiastic priest.

You will not be on your own. We have dedicated Associate Priests, Churchwardens, Benefice Administrator, Lay Leaders, two strong Committed PCCs and loyal parishioners.

We are supportive of flexible working patterns. Our priest's well-being is of paramount importance to us, and you will be encouraged to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

We look forward to meeting you and showing you around our Benefice.



## St Peter & St Paul's Church, Shiplake

The Church of St Peter & St Paul lies off the Reading Road in the Parish of Shiplake with Dunsden and serves the villages of Shiplake (population 1994 in 2021 Census and growing) and Binfield Heath (population 701 in 2021 Census).

It dates from about 1140AD, with later additions and overlooks the River Thames. Tennyson was married here in 1850. It lies on a single-track lane that leads to the grounds of Shiplake College and to a steep bridleway down to The Thames Path and the river.

Shiplake College, an independent co-educational secondary school, is adjacent to the church and pupils fill the church daily for their morning assemblies. The church has a good relationship with the College, which makes an annual contribution towards church running costs. In June a shared service by the river is very special. A new part-time Chaplain was appointed in September 2024, who has volunteered to join the clergy to preside at Holy Communion during the interregnum. The Rectory is adjacent to the churchyard and church.

Shiplake CofE VC Primary and Nursery School, our increasingly popular village school, is situated a short distance away. The children attend services at St Peter & St Paul's at the end of each term and for other special occasions.



**Riverside Communion** 



"Our children value attending regular services and building relationships with the clergy and lay leaders".

Katherine Page-Howie, Primary School Head-Teacher St Peter & St Paul's Church, Shiplake





Year 6 Leavers are given a Bible and a hand-crafted 'cross in the pocket' at the Leavers' Assembly. Clergy and Lay Leaders take Collective Worship weekly at the school. The incumbent is a Governor of the school. We believe there is considerable opportunity to develop this link more fully.

The church has recently been redecorated and fitted with a new sound system and multifunction LED lighting. The PCC would like to replace the pews with high quality moveable chairs to allow more flexible use of the church space.

At the entrance to Church Lane there is a large area belonging to the PCC. There was a church hall on this site which was demolished in 2024 as it was no longer viable due to structural and asbestos issues. Discussions are taking place to build affordable housing on this site that would create an income for the church. This together with the pew replacement could be exciting projects for a new incumbent.

Behind the church is The Ark, a lovely oak-framed building, with kitchen and toilet facilities, opened in 2012. It is an excellent venue for children's activities, group meetings and social events. The Ark can be let out to local groups.

Sunday Holy Communion services are currently held weekly at 11.00am on the 1st and 2nd Sundays and draw a loyal congregation of 12-14. A simple short afternoon Lay Led service on the



The Ark

3rd Sunday has recently been introduced, '3 at 3' with specific opportunities for children (attendance 26 adults and 6 children). On the 4th Sunday, the Benefice Service with Wholeness and Healing rotates around the three churches and is well-attended. On Remembrance Sunday,



Inside The Ark



a joint service at the War Memorial is shared with the College, who often provide a bugler.

Shiplake Church is blessed with a fine ring of eight new bells, installed in 2010 following local fundraising and the bells are rung every Sunday before services. The bell tower is equipped with a computer simulator, a dumb bell for teaching initial bell handling and cameras that allow the bells to be seen on a television in the ringing chamber. Visitors come from far and wide to use the bells. Tuition is given to anyone who is interested. The Shiplake Ringing Centre is a recognised centre of good practice in the promotion and teaching of bell ringing. It focuses on the ringers from the Reading Branch of the Oxford Diocesan Guild of Church Bell Ringers. There is also a hand bell ringing group in the village.

Our organist, Helen Lam, is an experienced musician and a hand chime specialist. She is keen to restart a choir and work with children. She is currently a peripatetic teacher at the primary school. During half-terms we have held very successful children's activity days in The Ark which are now incorporated in '3 at 3'.



## All Saints Church, Dunsden

All Saints Church is an attractive small church of silver-grey brick with stone dressings, built in 1842, with money donated by the Palmer family at Holme Park, Sonning (now Reading Blue Coat School), which seats about 140.

It serves the villages of Dunsden Green and Playhatch (population 421 in 2021 Census) and Binfield Heath (population 701 in 2021 Census).

The church stands in farmland on a narrow lane at a junction of footpaths, with only a few adjacent houses. It has a magnificent car park with capacity for eighty cars - a major asset. The church is sometimes used for community events, something which could be expanded.

Holy Communion Services take place every Sunday, apart from first Sundays, when Morning Praise is taken by one of our lay leaders.

Attendance is 20-5, mainly elderly but active parishioners. Special services attract higher numbers; around 40 for Mothering Sunday, 50 for Remembrance Sunday and 70+ for the Snowdrop Sunday Service in February. We are recognised as a friendly, welcoming church, offering post-service refreshments, weekly 'cuppa & chat' session and regular celebratory

lunches and special events, such as Pancake Supper.

The church is in good structural order. A Quinquennial Inspection took place in 2020. The unspoiled interior has been recently decorated and there are several beautiful Victorian stained-glass windows by Hardman.

On the south side, there is also a striking modern new stained-glass window celebrating the WWI poet, Wilfred Owen, who was a lay assistant in the parish from 1911-3. After several years of hard work to raise sufficient funds, a competition for a design was held jointly by the Worshipful Company of Glaziers, the Dunsden Owen Association and the PCC. Natasha Redina's entry was chosen, commissioned, installed and eventually dedicated in November 2023, by the Bishop of Oxford.

The new window is attracting groups interested in stained glass, Wilfred Owen, local history or walking. While Wilfred Owen is buried in Ors, France where he was killed, his parents and sister are buried in the churchyard.

Lay people offering talks on the window is providing a small new income stream, with potential to expand. These talks and walks are often combined with lunch at the Loddon Brewery, which is only a field away. The brewery is situated beside a community orchard and our beautifully renovated Eye & Dunsden Village Hall, the former village primary school.





All Saints has a long history of planning concerts, fetes, flower festivals and social events. On 16 February this year our annual Snowdrop Sunday took place, raising £1200 and entertaining several hundred local people. Currently, popular monthly community lunches take place, plus Anna lunches for the elderly.

In recent years some pews have been removed from the church to give more space for activities.

There is a small kitchen area beside the font. A generous parishioner has promised funds to provide a new kitchen extension and disabled toilet on the north side of the church. If this extension does proceed, it could be a major project for the next incumbent and bring many benefits.

The beautiful All Saints organ was built in the late 19th century, by Holditch of London, and is





regularly tuned and maintained. At the time of writing we have a wonderful organist, Adrian Vernon Fish. He plays the final organ music as though part of a recital, with the congregation remaining quiet during this music. Sadly for us, Adrian expects to move to Wales soon which will leave a vacancy.



Natasha Redina, the Owen Window designer, with a panel during installation





# St Margaret of Antioch, Harpsden

We are biased in saying this, but we are very proud of the special church community that is St. Margaret's. You will see that we are a small church but inside big and amazing things happen!

Harpsden is a small hamlet (population 942 in the 2021 Census), just a couple of miles from Henley on Thames, and is home to Henley Golf Club and Harpsden Cricket Club. The church dates from the 12th Century with later additions and is built of local flint. In the grounds stands St. Birinus Oratory, a small room created from the original lych-gate which historically led into the grounds of Harpsden Court behind the church and is used by the current owners to gain access to the church. It has been used as a quiet place of prayer and is open at all times. The church is also open all day for private prayer. The churchyard is de-commissioned. Interments are carried out in the Church's Cemetery just a few yards down Harpsden Road.

The church is fully Health and Safety compliant and in good structural repair. A Quinquennial inspection was carried out in 2024.

The style of worship is largely traditional with a Holy Communion service three times a month. Once a month we have Lay Led Morning Praise, which has proven to be very popular. There is a strong, loyal and dedicated congregation (average attendance 55) in a church that encourages and achieves a high level of commitment and participation. We have an active PCC taking full responsibility for all church activities. We have a committed and enthusiastic team of Lay Leaders and two members of the Anna Chaplaincy. Our church is ready always to take on whatever new challenges arise.

Music plays an integral part in supporting and enhancing our worship during the regular services at St Margaret's, both by leading the congregation's singing, and performing beautiful and more challenging music to the praise of God. We are very fortunate to be able to rely upon the resources of a dedicated choir numbering up to around twenty individuals, singing a varied selection of hymns, anthems, psalms, Taizé chants, songs and carols. In addition to contributing to our Sunday services at St Margaret's the choir sings regularly at





Choir of St Margaret's

weddings, funeral and memorial services, and at the occasional concert. It also helps support the monthly Benefice Services at Shiplake and Dunsden, and during Christmas time performs Carol Concerts for the residents of local care homes. Accompaniment to the choir is provided by the organist using both the beautiful wellmaintained antique pipe organ and our Yamaha electric piano.

Our Benefice Sunday School, held at St Margaret's, is a vibrant ministry dedicated to nurturing children's faith through engaging activities like biblical storytelling, dramatic performances, child-led services, and church exploration. With eight regular attendees and up to twenty-five children on the register, the Sunday School aims to create a welcoming environment that brings families into the church community, fosters intergenerational relationships, and strengthens spiritual development. Looking ahead, the Sunday School envisions expanding its physical space, encouraging more consistent family attendance, with a future goal of deepening intergenerational involvement and continuing to grow and reach more children and families, - a warm and loving family of God where people feel truly welcomed and spiritually nourished.

We have a Bible Study group every week and a prayer group which also meets weekly but in a local residence for the over 55s. In addition, the Lay team hold a Holy Communion service once a month in local Care Homes. Holy Communion is also offered privately at home throughout the



St Birinus Oratory



Patronal Festival of St Margaret and the Dragon

benefice both by the Lay team and the Anna Chaplaincy.

Socially, we have a Fellowship Lunch meeting once a month; fundraising activities and gatherings for festivals, such as Harvest Lunch and Patronal Festival. We publish a monthly magazine, *Harpsden Parish News*, circulated by email with hard copies delivered locally.

We are hoping to encourage the wider community to our church in the form of a large, well equipped, extension which will provide excellent facilities for use by local groups. This is to be funded privately.

Financially we are in a good position, meeting 100% of our Parish Share. Charitable giving is currently £3000 per annum.



Harvest Festival



Christingle

### Who are we?



#### Reverend Pam Gordon

Pam, Associate Priest with Permission to Officiate from the Bishops of Dorchester and Reading, was ordained in 2002. She served in Wargrave and Knowl Hill before joining this benefice in 2012. Her calling was within the context of 'leading from the second chair'. In addition to Sunday services there was a particular focus on school chaplaincy, pastoral services and healing ministry.

For the interregnum, both PCCs asked her to act with responsibility for ministry, in liaison with churchwardens and the former Rector's personal assistant. This continues responsibility for developing lay ministry and pastoral care and extends to organisation of services' cover and the integration of administration with ministry, especially differentiating priests' contributions. Anticipating these responsibilities, Pam has resigned as a clergy widows' officer in the Diocese. She remains in a Diocesan advisory team related to healing.

In the wider context of her story, Pam retired from teaching in special education after breast cancer. She has found contemplative photography and multisensory worship to be powerful sources of holy encounter. In challenging pre-diabetes, Pam has given more attention to self-care. New experiences opened opportunities for ecumenical ministry in nonchurch settings.



Reverend Heather Turner

Heather is a mature ordained priest of 30 plus years (1994), having now served in four dioceses in a variety of roles from parish ministry, chaplaincy within children and adult hospices, diocesan responsibility amongst the deaf and deaf blind. Currently, exercising ministry in this Benefice with Permission to Officiate as an Associate Priest since moving to the area in October 2022. Sensing the need of many of our mature congregation, the opportunity was taken to hone ministry skills through Anna Chaplaincy and an NVQ 2 in Dementia care. Heather is currently offering three Sundays a month and part-time weekday ministry.



Leigh Leadbetter

When I retired from my post as Deputy Head at Shiplake Primary School, Revd Robert asked me to join the benefice in 2020 as Rector's PA. Since then, my role has much expanded and now it is an amalgam of various responsibilities. Currently I hold the following roles within the Benefice: Administrator, including PCC Secretary, Safeguarding Officer, Data Protection Officer and Health & Safety Officer. I thoroughly enjoy working with all the hardworking people who volunteer so much of their time maintaining both the fabric and the life of each church. One of my most interesting projects has been mapping the graveyards. Each church has a famous person linked to it: Shiplake - Tennyson; Harpsden - Jane Austen; Dunsden - Wilfred Owen.



Churchwardens (from left)

John Bodman & Rosemary Jones
All Saints Church

David Ward & Valerie Nicholson St Margaret of Antioch

Wendy Robinson St Peter & St Paul's

#### **Benefice Office**

There is a well-equipped Benefice office in Shiplake church, where we have the part-time service of our wonderful Parish Administrator, Leigh. Benefice costs are shared 2:1: Shiplake with Dunsden: Harpsden.



Lay Leaders

Back row: Vic Morgan, Wendy Robinson, Jo Taylor, David Ward, Valerie Nicholson, Paul Barrett Front row: Revd Pam Gordon (Team Co-ordinator), Sheila Stanbridge-Bennett, Yvonne Watson, Revd Heather Turner, Linda Glithro, Rosemary Jones, John Bodman

## Regular service pattern

	First Sunday	Second Sunday	Third Sunday	Fourth Sunday	Fifth Sunday
Shiplake	11am Holy Communion	11am Holy Communion	3pm Third Sunday at 3 Intergenerational Worship*	10am Benefice Service with Wholeness and Healing (Rotates around the three churches)	
Dunsden	11am Morning Praise*	11am Holy Communion	11am Holy Communion		11am Morning Praise*
Harpsden	9.30am Holy Communion	9.30am Morning Praise*	9.30am Holy Communion		9.30am Sunday School Led Morning Praise*



#### **Notes**

\*These services do not have Holy Communion and are Lay Led.

Sunday School leading the fifth Sunday service will start in 2025.

There is Sunday School every Sunday at Harpsden at 9.30am, even when there is no service.

There is Holy Communion at 10am at Harpsden every Wednesday, including Wholeness and Healing on the 1st Wednesday of the month.

There is Morning Prayer at 9am every Monday at Shiplake which is also on Zoom.

Please see the website www.achurchnearyou.com/benefice/27-442AP/ "What's on This Week" page and monthly Diary for seasonal variations to the regular pattern.

#### **PCC**

Both Parishes have active PCCs that meet both separately and jointly. The Churchwardens of the three churches are meeting with Pam and Heather monthly. The two PCCs have their own bank accounts but currently have the same treasurer. Both parishes hold charitable status. The benefice is blessed with financial capital generously donated by past parishioners.

The parish of Harpsden had a bequest of over £440,000 recently which was added to substantial funds received when the village school was closed. This parish just manages to cover the parish share through a combination of giving and interest on monies invested.

The parish of Shiplake with Dunsden also has donated money. These funds have been donated to the individual churches within the parish. Currently this parish struggles to pay its parish share. When it does pay the full parish share, some of the funds must come from investments as giving and interest are insufficient. The challenge for this parish is to increase the congregations and the giving.

## The Rectory

The Rectory is a well-proportioned detached 4-bedroom house built in the 1960s adjacent to St Peter and St Paul's Church in Shiplake. It is situated on the west side of Shiplake churchyard with access from Church Lane. The house sits in its own fenced garden with mature lawns and flowerbeds. The approach is through its own gated short drive with parking for several cars. There is an attached garage for two cars.

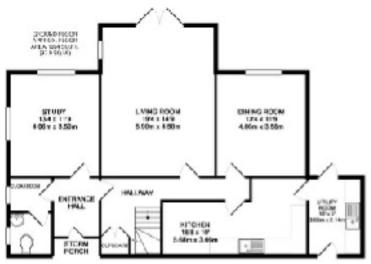
The accommodation comprises a study, two further reception rooms, downstairs toilet, two bathrooms, kitchen and a utility room.

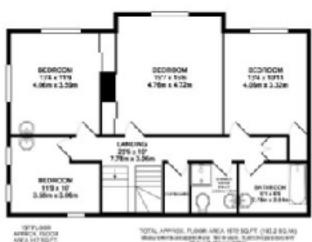
There are lots of footpaths directly surrounding the Rectory so 'dog'/country walks are instantly accessible.











## Thank you...

For reading our Benefice Profile. We hope that you feel inspired to come and visit us to learn more about us. You will be made very welcome.

We have tried to keep our profile concise by not including information that can be found on websites.

The Benefice website is hosted on A Church Near You, where you will find lots more information. www.achurchnearyou.com/benefice/27-442AP/

It is regularly maintained by a volunteer and gives details of services, events and activities at all three churches. The website and the weekly newsletter from the Benefice Office enable us to communicate with both regular worshippers and the wider public.

As a Benefice we are keen to encourage and develop our potential for outreach and community relations. This final section shows websites for some of the various organisations and groups within our Benefice where we currently have links or where there is potential to build relationships.

#### Local websites

Shiplake CE Primary School shiplakeprimary.org.uk

Shiplake College www.shiplake.org.uk

Gillotts School gillotts.org.uk

Harpsden Woodland Pre-School www.harpsdenpreschool.co.uk

#### Local Shops

There are convenience stores with Post Office facilities in Binfield Heath and Shiplake that serve their communities and our Benefice. Shiplake also benefits from an excellent butcher. There are three local repair garages.

Shiplake Ringing Centre odg.org.uk/reading/shiplake-ringing-center

**Shiplake Memorial Hall** 

www.shiplakehall.com Shiplake Memorial Hall (equivalent to the village hall) was established in 1927 to those who fell in WWI.

Shiplake and Dunsden Dramatic Organisation (SHADDO) www.shaddo.uk

Shiplake Village Interest Groups shiplakevillages.com/index.php?pid=153

Shiplake Women's Institute
The Women's Institute meets at the Memorial Hall
every third Wednesday. Contact
Rosemaryjones@yhaoo.co.uk

#### Shiplake & Dunsden British Legion

The Shiplake & Dunsden Branch of the Royal British Legion meets bi-monthly and aims to raise money for the Poppy Appeal, raising in the region of £6,000 each year. Contact Rosemaryjones@yhaoo.co.uk

Eye and Dunsden Village Hall dunsdenvillagehall.org.uk

#### **Binfield Heath Chapel**

www.binfieldheathchurch.org.uk Binfield Heath Chapel is a congregational church based in of Binfield Heath (within the Parish of Shiplake with Dunsden)

Binfield Heath Village Society www.binfieldheath.org.uk/home

Binfield Heath Polo Club www.binfieldheathpoloclub.co.uk

Binfield Heath Flower and Dog Show www.binfieldheathflowershow.com

Owen in Dunsden Association owenindunsden.org

Harpsden Village Hall www.harpsdenhall.org.uk

The Rector is encouraged to accept an ex-officio position as a member of the committee of management of the John Hodges Trust for Harpsden Village Hall. John Hodges is buried at St Margaret's.

Harpsden Cricket Club harpsden.play-cricket.com/

YMCA Henley www.henleyymca.org.uk

Henley Golf Club www.henleygc.com

Beavers, Cubs and Scouts in the Benefice shiplakevillages.com/index.php?pid=152

#### Pubs in the Benefice

#### Shiplake

The Baskerville Arms www.thebaskerville.com, The Plough www.theploughshiplake.co.uk, Orwells Restaurant orwellsrestaurant.com

#### Playhatch

The Crown www.thecrown.co.uk,
The Shoulder of Mutton theshoulderplayhatch.co.uk

#### **Binfield Heath**

The Bottle and Glass Inn www.bottleandglassinn.com

Dunsden Green

Loddon Brewery Tap Yard loddonbrewery.com/tapyard

#### Care Homes in the Benefice

There are two residential care homes for elderly residents in Shiplake: Lashbrook House bondcare.co.uk, and The Tower House carehome.co.uk. In Henley, Henley Manor, hallmarkcarehomes.co.uk