

The United Benefice of
Steeple Aston
with
North Aston & Tackley
Benefice Profile



SS Peter & Paul, Steeple Aston



St Mary's, North Aston



St Nicholas, Tackley

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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.

The Benefice of Steeple Aston with North Aston and Tackley is seeking a Rector who will be warm, welcoming to all and friendly. The new Rector will be approachable, relaxed and have an appropriate confidence. The new minister will be observant, spotting needs and opportunities within the congregations and the three villages. They will be prepared to give of themselves as they partner in God's mission with the three churches. The benefice has also expressed that they would appreciate someone who will be on time!



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 the diversity within the benefice – the successful candidate would themselves be someone who values everyone as a child of God.

You will find a small and 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 important position and look forward to the possibility of welcoming you as a potential colleague to partner in the gospel. With every blessing,

+ Gavin Dorchester

Rt. Revd Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester

General Introduction

Welcome to our profile which we hope will give you some insights into our Benefice which comprises the churches of St Peter and St Paul, Steeple Aston; St Mary's, North Aston and St Nicholas, Tackley. The Benefice is in the Deanery of Woodstock, within Oxford Diocese. Our area bishop is Bishop Gavin Collins, the Bishop of Dorchester. Services are held each Sunday at all three churches (except where there is a fifth Sunday, when there is a United Benefice service) attended by a regular band of worshippers.

It has been quite some time since we have been able to function as we would want, due to Covid and our last Rector's illness and sabbatical, but we are very much looking forward to welcoming our new Rector and want to work creatively with them to develop church life so that more people come to value and appreciate our churches and all they stand for.

We would welcome informal visits from prospective applicants. If you would like to do this and learn more about us, please contact one of the wardens, whose details can be found on our benefice website:

<https://www.sntchurch.com/>

The Benefice – Worship and Ministry

The normal pattern of services in the Benefice has been:

	North Aston	Steeple Aston	Tackley
1 st Sunday	BCP Communion 9.30 am	BCP Communion 11.00 am	Evensong 5.30pm
2 nd Sunday	Family Service or Morning Prayer 9.30 am	Family Service or Morning Prayer 11.00 am	Holy Communion 5.30 pm
3 rd Sunday	Holy Communion 9.30 am	Holy Communion 11.00 am	Informal Service or Evensong 5.30 pm
4 th Sunday	Morning Prayer 9.30 am	Morning Prayer 11.00 am	Family Communion 9.30 am
5 th Sunday	United Benefice Communion – our churches take turns to host		

Some changes have recently been unavoidable – due to Covid in the first instance and more recently to the interregnum.

Each church has a small but regular congregation and in each village congregations swell when there is a particular service such as Easter, Remembrance Sunday and Harvest Festival.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, there was a weekly Benefice Bible Study which took place at the Rectory. During the lockdowns, Bible Studies and a “Living in Love and Faith” course were led by the Rector via Zoom. In previous years, Benefice Lent courses have also been held.

We have one LLM, Richard Bailey, based in North Aston, who takes services from time to time at all three churches.

St Peter and St Paul, Steeple Aston



Attendance at services varies – perhaps about 20 – 25 on a ‘normal’ Sunday morning but as many as 59 or 60 for the special services such as Remembrance Sunday, the popular Crib service and the Carol Service for which (as well as at Easter) a volunteer choir gathers. We may only have 50 people on our electoral role but there are strong feelings in the village that the church belongs to all whether they attend services or not and we encourage any sort of involvement in church life.

We enjoy hymns from the Ancient and Modern collection and many people stay for coffee and a chat after morning service, prepared by a rota of willing people although our facilities for making refreshments are very limited. This does not stop us from organising a variety of events during the year which are supported by people from the village as well as the congregation, sometimes hiring the Village Hall, which is better equipped than we are. These include Snowdrop Sunday Tea, the Church Quiz and the Harvest Supper. The Church Fete simply wouldn’t happen without participation from many villagers. It’s an important day in the village calendar. Recently we have instituted an All Saints Tea to say thank you to people who contribute so much to the church but who do not necessarily come to services regularly.

Many members of the church are also actively involved in village life.



St Nicholas, Tackley



St Nicholas Church has a small regular congregation of around 15 people on Sundays, similar numbers to before the coronavirus pandemic, with much larger attendances at services such as All Soul's, Remembrance and Christmas. We have very good organist who plays at our services and we gather a choir for the Carol Service. We have joint services with Tackley Methodist Church a couple of times a year.

Evensong is valued by our congregation. Holy Communion services are from Common Worship and hymns from Ancient and Modern. Our monthly morning Family Communion hopes to attract families, but in recent times we have rarely had children at our services, except for an occasional Baptism.

Other Denominations

Tackley has a long-established small but active Methodist Church, which has a Sunday morning service, mid-week coffee morning and monthly Messy Church.

Canon Fr Robin Gibbons is a retired Catholic Priest living in Tackley. He is an honorary ecumenical canon of Christ Church Cathedral. He has permission to take Evensong at St Nicholas and he is often asked to take village funerals.

Rev Geoff Hunter, a retired Methodist minister, is an active member of St Nicholas Church.

St Mary the Virgin, North Aston



Our Church Electoral Roll has remained stable in recent times and currently stands at 26. As many other churches have found since Covid, the attendance at our weekly Sunday morning services tends to vary. However, we are extremely fortunate to have a small group of regular worshippers of around 11-15 people who make up our church family and where Christian fellowship abounds. Of course, the number of church attendees at Christmas, Easter and other Feast Days is far greater. At Christmas a group of villagers come together to form an informal and excellent choir to sing at our Carol Service. There is also a group of volunteer bell-ringers who ring for United Benefice services and other special services and events.



Church Buildings

St Peter and St Paul, Steeple Aston

The building is a medium to large church with central nave, north and south aisles, chancel and Lady Chapel. This chapel contains a large memorial to Judge Francis Paige and his wife. There is a western tower containing eight bells which are rung regularly by our active and enthusiastic band of bellringers. On the north side of the Lady Chapel is a vestry.

The earliest parts of the building date back to the 12th century, but almost every age has left its mark on the structure. Over the last 20 years much time has been spent exploring the possibilities of modernising the building and installing a kitchen, toilet, better heating system and more flexible space. It is hoped this will come to fruition in the years ahead.

More urgently, following our Quinquennial inspection in 2021, work will need to be carried out on the Lady Chapel roof and this is being planned.

The rest of the building and churchyard is in good repair. The church is well cared for by a number of volunteers from both church and village who regularly clean the inside and working parties are held in the churchyard. The building was completely rewired and new lighting installed about 20 years ago, along with extensive repairs to the stonework.

The church owns the Steeple Aston Cope – an outstanding and rare example of Opus Anglicanum – Medieval Embroidery. It is so valuable that it is kept at the V&A Museum.



St Nicholas, Tackley

The church building is set on the contours of a hill on the edge of the village. It is surrounded by its churchyard which is open for burials, but now with limited space. The new North Oxford Memorial Park and Crematorium (Memoria) is in our parish. The Tackley Local History Group has an exhibition "Tackley Through Time" in the south porch of the church.

The church tower houses a set of 6 bells, and Tackley bell ringers ring most Sundays.

The church fabric is in generally good condition. In 2008-2012 the Warmer Welcome appeal raised funds which were spent on repairs, redecoration, heating & plumbing, installation of a toilet, and a servery where we can serve refreshments after services. Tackley's Quinquennial was in 2019. There are no major issues outstanding.

Many villagers value the church as an historical building and like it being available for christenings, weddings, funerals and burials and occasional major services. We have a small but active group who maintain the church and churchyard and can call on a wider circle who are pleased to help in such things as flower arranging and fundraising, participating in the summer fete and Christmas Fair.

St Mary the Virgin, North Aston

The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin is a typical medieval stone-built village church of chancel, clerestoried nave, 2 aisles, a Lady Chapel, a screen, a 14th century font, a new organ, west tower with bells, and a small vestry. There was a substantial Victorian restoration, which appears to have swept away the monuments and glass that existed, apart from a fine medieval alabaster effigy memorial. The church fabric is in good condition, having undergone regular repair and maintenance over the past 30+ years. The church is surrounded on 3 sides by its churchyard which is still used as the village cemetery but approaches full capacity.

The Quinquennial was in 2019 and some projects are in the process of being undertaken. Two of the three gothic windows in the S aisle were fully repaired and conserved 3 years ago and given new clear glass. The church roofs have been re-leaded in the recent past and the building is now watertight. A new electric organ was donated in 2018 which can be played by an organist or by pre recorded MIDI files kept on the hard drive.

Church Finances

Each Parish within the Benefice has its own PCC which controls its own Parish affairs. However, there is cooperation between the PCCs for organising benefice-wide events and paying for the Rector's expenses.

The income and expenditure for the last 3 years is given below, but this is somewhat unrepresentative due to the COVID restrictions, as the churches were unable to hold services and fundraising events for much of this time.

St Peter and St Paul, Steeple Aston

For Steeple Aston, the Parish Share has normally been paid in full until 2021, which was underpaid by £16,000, (£10,000 of this was allocated to be paid, but due to a timing issue the cheque did not clear in time). The Parish Share will be paid in full for 2022, with only £4,573 remaining to pay.

Steeple Aston generates most of its income from donations and fundraising events. It has no endowment, property or land rental to supplement voluntary giving. We recognize that the finances need careful consideration to ensure financial sustainability and to cover future repair costs and building development. Our current building plans have been put on hold since COVID and will need to be revisited in the near future.

Year	2022 (8 months)	2021	2020	2019
Income	£39,559.10	£36,665.00	£36,728.00	£51,741.00
Expenditure	£33,687.51	£26,545.00	£38,812.00	£51,603.00
Surplus/deficit	£5,871.59	£10,120.00	-£2,084.00	£138.00
Unrestricted Reserves	£23,629.62	£27,166.48	£17,073.63	£19,138.93
Building reserves	£2,058.65	£2,052.77	£2,051.70	£2,043.02
Brooks bequest (shares)				£5,367.35
Total liquid assets	£25,688.27	£29,219.25	£19,125.33	£26,549.30

St Nicholas, Tackley

St Nicholas Church was fortunate to be bequeathed a bungalow by a former organist a few years ago. Three terraced houses, Clow Cottages, were built on the site: two were sold and one is rented out. The rental income means we have been able to pay our Parish Share in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The PCC is investigating using a proportion of the remaining capital to renovate the organ. Currently some of the capital is also used for our annual expenses and this is something which we need to address.

Year	2021	2020	2019
Income	£25,884	£25,586	£25,467
Expenditure	£32,197	£29,177	£14,916
Surplus/Deficit	-£6,312	-£3,391	£10,551
Clow Cottages		£175,953	-£10,000
Balance at bank	£175,122	£181,440	£9,078

St Mary the Virgin, North Aston

Year	2022 (part)	2021	2020	2019
Income	£10,563	£10,246	£13,432	£15,109
Expenditure	£7,506	£11,057	£14,337	£12,458
Surplus/deficit	£3,057	-£811	-£905	£2651
Current account balance at 31Dec		£16,478	£17,958	£18,884
Building account balance at 31 Dec		£23,224	£23,734	£22,298

The Villages

Steeple Aston



Village and Parish

In 2020 the population was given as 961 people in 343 households.

Steeple Aston is a very attractive conservation area village built around a valley whose stream runs into the River Cherwell. New housing has been built regularly since the 1960's and this continues.

Transport links are good:

- Regular bus service to Oxford and Banbury.
- Heyford Rail Station is nearby, next to the Oxford Canal
- Road links are excellent: A4260 Oxford-Banbury road is near; good roads connect to Bicester, the M40 and beyond.

Facilities include:

- The ancient Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul
- Dr Radcliffe's Primary School – a highly rated active Church School. Recent Ofsted inspection includes “good” and “outstanding” (see below). The village is in the catchment area for Heyford Park secondary school.
- A Pre-School
- Village Hall, Sports Hall and sports field/recreation ground.
- Village Shop/Post Office.
- The Red Lion Public house on Southside
- The Holt Hotel is at Hopcroft Holt crossroads where there is also a petrol station and car repair garage

Activities. A lively village; 32 voluntary societies listed in the Village magazine, *Steeple Aston Life*, plus 9 regular non voluntary bodies -among the latter an active Parish Council. Prominent in the clubs are sports , horticultural, garden and allotments societies, choir ,WI, craft clubs etc., with all their associated activities A thriving Valentine's club with a very full schedule exists for the over 60's.The church runs an **Annual Fete** in early July. Very popular **Annual Flower Shows** are run by the Horticultural Society.

Middle Aston is a separate hamlet of about 90 people just north of Steeple Aston. Made up mainly of old cottages it also has the large Middle Aston House which currently offers hospitality and conference facilities. Though Middle Aston is part of the parish of Steeple Aston Church administratively it has its own Parish Meeting .

Businesses in and around the church-parish include Hatch End Business Estate housing a variety of small businesses ; a car repairs and servicing garage in the village; a number of farms; a stables plus small businesses run from people's homes.

Dr Radcliffe's School, Steeple Aston

Dr Radcliffe's CE Primary School is a school within the ODST MAT and has strong links with the Church.

The school holds services in the Church throughout the year, including Harvest, Christmas and Easter, and other events such as activities that explore Pentecost, which we would like to be supported by, and have the involvement of, the Rector.

The Rector will be an ex officio member of the Dr Radcliffe's Foundation, which supports our school, as well as the Local Governing Body. The Governing Body holds six meetings a year; we encourage additional link visits to our School alongside working in partnership with the Headteacher and the governors to support the Christian ethos of the school and involvement in SIAMs preparation.

We would like the Rector to play an active role in the life of the school, playing a part in leading collective worship, working closely with the Headteacher and RE lead and communicating, and so further strengthening, how the Church and the School work together to the wider community. We would like the Rector to be a part of the life of the school, be known by pupils and staff and to be approachable source of support.

Frances Brown, Headteacher

<https://www.dr-radcliffes.org.uk>

Website: <https://www.steepleaston.org.uk/>

Tackley



The village of Tackley, about 8 miles north of Oxford city centre, has a Church of England Primary school, a community-run village shop & post office, village hall, playground, sports pitch, a pub and a railway station linking Banbury and Oxford. There is also an hourly bus service from Banbury to Oxford which calls at Steeple Aston and Tackley. In the last three years almost 100 new houses have been built in the village, increasing the population to around 1,400. Household incomes vary considerably. It is a friendly village with an active community life and many interest groups and organisations for all age groups from toddler group to Silver Threads for the over 60s.

Website: www.tackleyvillage.co.uk

Tackley CE Primary School

The Headteacher of Tackley CE Primary School, Lauren Murrey writes:

“Tackley CE Primary School is part of the Oxfordshire Diocesans Schools Trust of schools and has strong links with the Church. The school holds regular services at St Nicholas Church during the school year; including Harvest, Christingle, Easter and a Y6 Leaver’s Service which we would like to continue to be supported by the Rector. The Rector makes an important contribution to the Local Governing Body of the school and we would like this relationship to continue, including regular visits to the school. We would like the Rector to play an active role in the life of the school; leading collective worship and supporting the school with Diocesan inspections, and being an active part of our wider school community.”

www.tackley.oxon.sch.uk

North Aston

North Aston is a small stone-built conservation area village lying partly round a large open village green and partly down lanes and small roads leading off it. The old medieval village near the church has gone, though there is a cluster of later houses round and near it. Next to the church is North Aston Hall, one of two large old houses in the village. Only a few new houses have been built since WW2 and there is no social housing. Families tend to stay in the village for a long time; some were born here.

When needed, Village and PCC meetings can be held in a small community room in the Old Bakery or in the church if appropriate. There are no other facilities in the village, as such, but a number of activities are organised in any given year. In June, we celebrated the Platinum Jubilee of our late Queen Elizabeth II, with a Big Lunch which was well attended. The annual village fete has become well known locally for its simple charm and highly innovative games and entertainments. The latter is a fundraising event with the profits being divided between village and church.

There is a monthly parish Newsletter, *The North Aston News*: one page is 'The Church Matters', news about the life of the church written by the rector; and the final page contains a list of all the services and church events in the Benefice for the coming month.

There are three enterprises in the village: North Aston Farms, an organic 900 acre farm with beef, sheep, arable and a small dairy; North Aston Organics, a box-scheme vegetable grower; and Nicholsons Nurseries. Nicholsons is a thriving high-end nursery working in forestry, landscaping and maintenance. The Nursery operates a well-known restaurant, The Yurt, which is a very popular lunch destination.

Website: www.north-aston.co.uk



The Rector's Ex-Officio Responsibilities

- The Rector sits on the governing bodies of the primary schools in Steeple Aston and Tackley.
- The Rector sits on the board of trustees of Dr Radcliffe's Foundation in Steeple Aston.
- The Rector is a trustee of the two Steeple Aston almshouses.

The Steeple Aston Rectory



This is a comfortable purpose-built family house which was constructed from local stone in the grounds of the former rectory in the 1980s. It has four bedrooms, a study, dining room, living room, kitchen, garage, parking etc, with quite a large garden, set in a secluded spot up a shared gravel drive next to the church. The school, playground and sports facilities are a short walk away, as is the village shop. The property has mains gas central heating.



Opportunities and Challenges

– Looking to the Future

1. Like many parishes, of late the numbers at worship have declined or at best remained steady. We want to work with our new Rector to explore how we might reverse this trend, increase regular worshippers, and reach out to all parishioners in the villages. We appreciate that this may well require us to change and develop what we do. The generally positive attitude to our churches in each village is a good place to start from. We hope our new Rector can help our thinking in this area.
2. See page 4 for the present pattern of worship and attendance across the Benefice. It represents a variety of styles of service, each cherished by sections of our communities. We recognise our new Rector may wish to negotiate some amendments/changes to the patterns of worship.
3. It would be good for us to restart groups enabling us to come together across the benefice to deepen our faith.
4. We would like to find ways to improve the physical environment and amenities of our church buildings, so that the churches can offer a warmer welcome and greater hospitality and provide more to both individuals and groups in the benefice.
5. Recognising that the two church schools are an important aspect of village life in our benefice, we believe there is openness and potential here to build relationships that may lead to people coming to faith and attending church.
6. The arrival of new people in the benefice, particularly in the new housing, is an area that needs creative thinking.
7. As a team of church wardens we believe that it is most important that our new Rector is not 'tied to their desk' by administrative tasks that could be done by others and we give a high priority to exploring with her/him how administration can best be handled.

Person Specification

We are hoping and praying for

1. A warm, open, friendly and approachable person who is seen out and about in the villages, ready to support, enjoy and foster co-operation with village organisations and activities.
2. A person with a strong personal faith able to communicate with people of all ages and from any walk of life, offering pastoral care and support as together we work to build up church life and faith.
3. Someone who will develop a culture of teamwork and who will strengthen relationships across the Benefice.
4. Someone who will continue and increase positive relationships with staff, pupils and parents of our schools.
5. Someone able to facilitate change with sensitivity.
6. Someone who appreciates and understands village and rural life and cares about the environment, the importance of the church's approach to this and other issues of the day.
7. Someone who will enjoy and support the variety of musical talent which there is in these communities.