

THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST MICHAEL, ST ALBANS



WITH ST MARY, CHILDWICK GREEN



PARISH PROFILE 2011

DIOCESE OF ST ALBANS

Archdeaconry of St Albans, St Albans Deanery

Profile for the Benefice of St Michael, St Albans with St Mary,
Childwick Green

Population: 4,637

Electoral Roll: 285

Patron: Lord Verulam

CONTENTS

A. The Benefice	2
1. Locaton	2
2. Community	2
3. Education	3
4. Leisure and Recreation	3
5. Worship	4
6. Pastoral and Ecumenical	6
7. Leadership	7
8. Ministerial Team	8
9. Electoral Roll	8
10. Organisations	9
11. Buildings	10
12. Finance	11
13. Expenses of Office	12
14. Communications	12
15. Strengths and Weaknesses	12
B. Future Priorities for the Parish	14
C. New Encumbent Profile	15
D. Conditions of Service	15

A. THE BENEFICE

1. Location

The parish covers the south-western corner of St Albans, the two country estates of Gorhambury and Childwickbury and the hamlet of Potters Crouch. St Michael's parish church is a late Saxon Grade I listed building in St Michael's Village, a conservation area on the edge of St Albans. The church itself is situated on the site of the Roman basilica, the likely location of the trial of St Alban. The small sister church of St Mary (a Victorian chapel of ease) is a Grade II listed building. It is located by the green in the centre of the Childwickbury estate. St Michael's Church, with its Parish Centre, is at the heart of the St Michael's community, with many organisations using the premises for classes and events. The church is an object of great local affection, and there is an organisation of 'Friends', whose mission is to raise funds for its upkeep.



Map of the Parish

The parish itself consists of four main residential areas:

- St Michael's Village – a mix of older and more modern privately owned houses, with some tied housing for those attached to the Gorhambury estate.
- The Verulam Estate – a modern development of privately owned homes.
- Part of the Batchwood Estate – a mixture of local authority and privately owned housing.
- Childwickbury and Shafford – once part of the Childwick estate which was sold in lots to private individuals in the early 1970s. Now most are privately owned houses and cottages with a mix of young families and older couples.

There is also a considerable amount of rural and agricultural land within the parish.

2. Community

There is a mix of age groups within the parish. In addition to older working and retired people there is a significant presence of families with young children, attracted by the high quality of the schools in St Albans. There are very few young single people and those at the start of their career, who find the high cost of housing (among the UK's highest) prohibitive.

A. THE BENEFICE

The population of the parish is mainly white British, although there are a number of other nationalities (including Americans, Australians, Austrians, Germans, Georgians, Romanians and South Africans).

The parish residents are on the whole affluent and well educated. Many commute into London. The local economy is made up mainly of small offices and businesses, although a number of key financial services companies have offices in the area.

Unemployment is well below the national average, but has risen lately. St Mary's Childwick Green has some distinct issues quite separate from St Michael's that present concerns for its long-term viability.



Cake Sale at St Michael's

3. Education

St Albans is known for the quality of its schools. There are three within the parish. St Michael's School is a Church of England voluntary aided primary on two sites: Top School, located next to the parish church, and Lower School further down the street. There is a close relationship between church and school, with weekly assemblies in the church and a strong presence of active congregants on the governing body. Prae Wood primary school is on the Verulam Estate. There is not a strong history of involvement but a number of overtures have been made to them recently. Townsend School in the north of the parish is a Church of England secondary school, but there is very little interaction with St Michael's.

4. Leisure and Recreation

St Albans has a wide range of art and entertainment facilities including festivals, theatre, concerts, exhibitions, museums and sport complexes. St Albans FC is in the Southern Premier Division. The closest Championship club is nearby Watford FC. We also have several rugby clubs, one of which is OARFC, which was voted community club of the year and is in National League 2. It has a thriving mini and junior membership and a ladies side that is in the premiership.



The Flower Festival at St Mary's

A. THE BENEFICE

The shopping centre includes a range of small independent shops and chain stores and there is an excellent twice-weekly market. There is a Waitrose supermarket on the Verulam Estate, a Sainsburys in the south of the city, and a Tesco Metro in the centre.

Within St Michael's Village there is a main entrance to Verulamium Park – over 100 acres of beautiful parkland including the remains of the Roman City, an ornamental lake, a children's splash pool and various sporting facilities. Opposite the entrance to the church grounds is the Verulamium Museum of everyday life in Roman Britain – a modern museum with video presentations and touch-screen database.

St Albans contains a wide range of restaurants and a great many pubs. There are four excellent pubs in St Michael's Village, as well as St Michael's Manor, an award-winning 16th-century town house hotel and restaurant set in five acres of lakeside gardens. The Kingsbury Watermill and Waffle House is a popular tourist attraction, and also well patronised by locals.

5. Worship

Both St Michael and St Mary are best described as central in their traditions. St Michael's has a choir. Alb and stole are worn for Eucharistic services, while cassock, surplice, hood and preaching scarf are worn for non-Eucharistic services.

St Michael's Sunday Services

8.00 a.m. – Holy Communion, Common Worship, Order 2 traditional language, a quiet and meditative service (average attendance 10 and rising). Historically there has been no sermon at this service, but recently the previous incumbent began giving a short homily. This innovation has been well received.

9.30 a.m. – Parish Communion (average attendance 80–100 adults, 20–40 children). This is a Common Worship service and is the main act of worship in the parish. There is normally a choir. Music is accompanied



The Font at St Michael's



The Lady Chapel at St Michael's

A. THE BENEFICE

by organ and Common Praise is used. The sermon is usually about 8-10 minutes. We have a tradition of thoughtful and deep interaction with Scripture.

Children's groups meet at the same time and normally come into the church before Communion. Recently, the second Sunday of the month has become an inclusive all-age service, with the children in the church all the way through, and in 2011 the first group of children in this parish was admitted to Communion. These events mark a significant change in the life of the parish, and are part of our attempts to reach out to young families in the area.



After Service Coffee in the Parish Centre

Refreshments are regularly served after the service in the Parish Centre.

11.00 a.m. – Choral Matins on the second Sunday of the month. The average attendance is six (not including the choir). There is a sermon, usually the same as that given at the 9.30 service.

6.30 p.m. – BCP Choral Evensong with sermon on the fourth Sunday of the month. Average attendance is about eight (not including the choir).

St Mary's Sunday Services

6.00 p.m. – BCP Evensong, using the shorter prayer book, with Holy Communion (Order I traditional language) on the first Sunday of the month. Usual attendance is 15 plus. There is a sermon, and hymns are from Ancient and Modern New Standard.

Other Regular Services

There is a mid-week Eucharist at St Michael's on Wednesday mornings that regularly attracts about five to ten mainly older parishioners. During term time this is preceded by the weekly school service for St Michael's School, an event that attracts a number of parents and younger siblings in addition to the students and staff of St Michael's. This is a key point of contact with the wider community and is greatly valued by the school and local families.

Since September 2011 Morning Prayer has been said at St Michael's on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 9 a.m. by the Reverend Melanie Crowley.

A. THE BENEFICE

Special Services

There are services every day of Holy Week: said Compline on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings; stripping of the altar with meditation and vigil on Maundy Thursday; and on Good Friday the liturgy for the day. Sung Compline is available at St Mary's on Good Friday.

At Christmas there are carol services at both churches, a crib service with the family service (second Sunday) and a Christingle on Christmas Eve.



Harvest Festival

There is an All Souls service of commemoration to which all those bereaved in the previous two years and known to the parish are invited. This is a very popular service which attracts many who are not regular churchgoers.

Parish Communion includes special presentations from the children's groups in lieu of a sermon several times a year.

Baptisms, of which there were 26 in 2010, are held every fourth Sunday at the 9.30 service or by special arrangement at another time, usually midday Sunday. There were 13 weddings and 19 funerals at St Michael's in 2010. The churchyard is closed except for the interment of ashes. St Mary's too is a popular venue for weddings, particularly for smaller numbers, and also has facility for burial of ashes.

The Bishop of St Albans recently confirmed new church members at St Michael's.

6. Pastoral and Ecumenical

Pastoral Opportunities and Lay Support

At an institutional level, pastoral opportunities within the parish include its three schools and Fosse House, a residential home on the Verulam Estate with 60 residents, which the Reverend Melanie Crowley visits, giving spiritual support and celebrating the Eucharist once a month.



The West Window at St Michael's

A. THE BENEFICE

The clergy give pastoral care in the context of baptisms, weddings and funerals, and also conduct home Communion. The parish takes its responsibilities in this regard very seriously as they afford an opportunity to minister to the wider community and to gently welcome people into more active involvement with the church.

There is also an immense amount of quiet pastoral support given by individual parishioners to others such as home visits, providing transport, a monthly luncheon club for the elderly and generally looking out for one another, particularly the most vulnerable. We have numerous volunteers working in children's groups, churchyard working parties and cleaning and maintenance within the church. Members of the congregation also take an active part in worship, reading, administering Communion and leading intercessions.

Cooperation with Other Churches

We are members of Churches Together in St Albans. In addition to Deanery Chapter meetings, there is an active ecumenical Church Leaders meeting where local ministers worship together, share a breakfast and usually listen to guest speakers.

7. Leadership

The churchwardens consider their role to be largely pastoral and facilitative. They provide an interface between the clergy and the parishioners. Open and approachable as the clergy are, there are some parishioners who prefer to approach the churchwardens. The churchwardens also try to be aware of where there is a need and who might be able to meet that need, and to put the two together.



Team Meeting

The PCC comprises three members of clergy (including the vicar), two churchwardens, the treasurer, the secretary, two Deanery Synod representatives and nine elected members. Our busy congregation find it difficult to make the time commitment to attend PCC meetings and we currently have five vacancies.

Two assistant churchwardens have recently been appointed at St Michael's. Two deputy churchwardens are also elected in respect of St Mary's and they are invited to attend PCC meetings. Links between the PCC and the St Mary's churchwardens are on an informal and

A. THE BENEFICE

ad hoc basis. The PCC maintains responsibility for St Mary's but a large degree of autonomy exists and is respected by both churches.

The PCC meets six times a year. In addition it has set up three committees with particular responsibilities: Stewardship, Mission and Community, Pastoral and Worship. Each committee has six to eight members (including co-opted members) who meet at regular intervals throughout the year. There is also a Standing Committee comprising the incumbent, the churchwardens and two others to deal with matters arising between PCC meetings. Various responsibility holders report to the PCC or its committees on aspects of the management and upkeep of the church. The age range of the PCC members is 35–70.

St Mary's has a separate committee who meet as required. The age range of their committee is 40–80.

8. Ministerial Team

The Reverend John Hayton, our SSM, takes a very active role in the parish, and has an interest in spiritual direction. Our curate, Melanie Crowley, another SSM, has just started her second year of training in the parish. We also have the support of a reader, Dr Michael Ford, who is based at St Paul's Church in the east of the city and shares his time between the two parishes.

9. Electoral Roll

The pattern of churchgoing in the parish means that many people attend only every two or three weeks, hence the high number on the electoral roll (285) compared to average attendances. Approximately half those on the electoral roll live outside the geographical parish. St Michael's congregation is largely middle-aged and older, although in the last few years there has been a recent influx of younger families that we are keen to encourage. The age range of St Mary's, with a few exceptions, is 50–90, with an electoral roll of 27.



Assistant Priest Delivering Harvest Boxes



Our Curate

A. THE BENEFICE

10. Organisations

There is a choir, who are accompanied by our excellent organist, and a recently formed children's choir. There are two house study groups meeting monthly and a fortnightly Bible study group. Regular events include Lent and Autumn education programmes, quiet days, a pensioners' luncheon club, a Traidcraft stall, and a churchwatchers group who help us keep the church open to visitors in the summer months. We have a very active and successful team of bellringers ringing eight bells.



The Choir at St Michael's

There are also many special events throughout the year such as the Christmas Fayre (a joint venture with St Michael's School), the parish picnic, the bonfire party and various concerts and other fund-raising events. Since its foundation in 1980 the Friends of St Michael's Church has raised £100,000 by subscriptions and special events.



The Annual Bonfire Party

There are four Sunday school groups:

Climbers – a preschool group aged up to four and a half years. There is normally an activity and teaching content for the older toddlers. These are relaxed and informal sessions with play, activities and circle-time for songs, stories and prayers.

Explorers – for primary school children from age four and a half up to the end of infants school. Its aim is to offer Christian nurture with an emphasis on fun. The majority of activities are based on Bible readings, with worksheets from Christian literature, which include colouring-in and puzzles, with a related craft activity each week.



Welly Throwing Competition at a Parish Picnic

A. THE BENEFICE

Seekers – for junior school children (7 to 11 years old). It incorporates Bible reading and prayer, aiming to increase the children’s understanding of New Testament stories and the life of Jesus.

Trailblazers – for children of secondary school age (11 to 16 years). Currently the numbers are very low.

Tiny Tots playgroup meets on a Tuesday morning for our youngest members and their parents/carers, and non-church members are welcomed.

11. Buildings

St Michael’s Church is a Grade I listed building within the Conservation Area of St Albans. The last Quinquennial Report described the general condition of the fabric as ‘good’ and added that ‘there were no significant major repairs at present’. Various comparatively minor recommendations were made which have been, and are being, addressed. Skilled volunteer parishioners undertake maintenance of the fabric of the building. The churchyard is a scheduled Ancient Monument and is described in the Report as ‘very well maintained’. Legal responsibility falls on St Albans District Council but great credit is due to the regular churchyard working parties formed from volunteer parishioners.

There is a two-storey Parish Centre in the grounds of the church. It is used by church groups for meetings and social occasions and extensively hired out to the wider community for daytime and evening functions.



Seekers Sunday School Group



St Michael's Church South West View



The Parish Centre

A. THE BENEFICE

St Michael's Memorial Hall is a larger building in Branch Road within the parish. In addition to the Hall itself there is a kitchen and some smaller rooms used as classrooms by a nursery school which rents the building during weekdays in school term time. The Hall was built on land leased by the Patron, Lord Verulam, and while it does not belong to the church, the Stewardship Committee of the PCC has a watching brief over its maintenance. The church pays a fee for the use of the Hall for larger functions.

The School House flat is attached to the Top School and is maintained by the church (by means of a parishioner volunteer). The rent from this is used for the maintenance of the property and the balance is given to the school governors as required.

St Mary's, built in 1867, is an almost unique oasis of calm in a busy parish, set in delightful surroundings. The attached Victorian schoolroom has recently been redecorated and the kitchen refitted. In the church the heating and the floor have been replaced. There exists a great potential to support church functions and activities. It is currently used by a number of community organisations, ranging from the WI to art groups, providing a vital source of income. It also has some attached land (currently leased out annually), which could be utilised, although this would be a sensitive issue with the current tenants. There is potential for a far greater use of this very special place.



Interior of St Mary's church

In October 2009 some of the lead covering was stolen from the roof of St Michael's Church. The PCC decided that replacing the lead was not the best option in the current climate and opted for terne-coated stainless steel as an alternative. After being refused planning permission by St Albans District Council, we appealed to The Planning Inspectorate who granted permission. This work will be undertaken during the autumn of 2011. Our fund-raising efforts raised £100,000. The next project will be the repair of the font base, which has developed worrying cracks during the last two years.

12. Finance

St Michael's PCC finished the year ended 31 December 2010 with a net surplus of £60,293, bringing the total net surplus to £551,610. Current assets increased by £33,587 to £340,457 due to a bequest and a net gain in restricted funds. Current liabilities decreased by £5,651.

A. THE BENEFICE

Total investments increased by £21,056 to £215,608 due to an increase in market value rather than the purchase of new investments.

Christian stewardship is practised through envelopes and covenants, with a tax recovery through Gift Aid, which together with collections, donations, legacies and fund raising produced income of £107,217 out of a total received of £117,726.

Expenditure included the parish share cost of £68,207 (Diocesan Quota) and charitable donations of £8,137, which included an allocation of investment interest paid out annually to charities chosen by parishioners.

St Mary's runs separate accounts and attempt to meet its share of the parish quota, although in recent years St Michael's has been flexible in requiring this.

13. Expenses of Office

Expenses are reimbursed in full, which includes exceptional items such as books, entertainment, and petrol. Broadband and phonenumber facilities owned by the PCC are available in the vicar's study.

The Parish office is attached to the vicarage and includes a full suite of equipment including computer, printer and photocopier. There is an excellent parish administrator who works five mornings a week and is a very significant asset.

14. Communications

There is a parish magazine issued 10 times a year at a price of £6.00 per year, with contributions from parishioners, clergy, and members of the wider parish community. It is produced by an editorial team and professionally printed. There is also a four-page pew sheet available on Sunday mornings, with information about services and forthcoming events. Cards detailing Christmas and Easter services are delivered to all addresses in the parish.

Our parish website is <http://www.stmichaels-parishchurch.org.uk>. A committee is working to update this facility.

15. Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

We are a friendly open-minded competent congregation coming from a wide range of backgrounds in terms of churchmanship. The church has welcomed Melanie Crowley

A. THE BENEFICE

as the first woman member of the ministerial team. We have a tradition of excellent teaching through sermons, parish magazines articles, Lent courses and Autumn education programmes.

Children are welcome in church and, following a course of preparation approved by the Bishop, some children over seven years of age take Communion. We have excellent Sunday schools. The links to St Michael's School are strong and the Vicar is a school governor.

As parishioners we support the ministerial team and each other. There is significant lay involvement in worship and in pastoral care. We are supported by the Deanery and St Albans Abbey although the Abbey is close by it does not overshadow St Michael's. We have a highly efficient and reliable parish administrator and parishioners with a wide range of skills, who pool resources and work co-operatively. Our finances are reasonably healthy, the Parish Share is fully paid and on time.



Children playing in St Michael's Church Yard

Weaknesses

The children's ministry is a strength and we look forward to building on this. However, at the moment there are no specific groups for older adolescent children and young adults. The limited provision for children who reach secondary level is a serious issue and one we are considering how to address, possibly in conjunction with other local churches.

Our relationship with Prae Wood School is somewhat intermittent, though last year the vicar was invited to lead an act of worship for Harvest Festival at the school, and at Christmas their Carol Service took place in St Michael's. We have occasionally been asked to show groups round the church to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum. We look forward to strengthening this link.

St Michael's has few congregants from the Batchwood Estate. Our best contact with this area is through the school, especially the weekly service in church, which is attended by a number of parents, and (rarely) through the occasional offices. We look forward to exploring ways of establishing positive contact with this part of the parish.

B. FUTURE PRIORITIES FOR THE PARISH

St Michael's is a liturgical church, but that doesn't mean it cannot be a growing and mission-oriented church. It has a history of being a larger and more active church than it is at present, but in the last two decades has experienced a slow decline in attendance and activities. Our previous incumbent, being a young man with a small child, developed a connection with the young families who previously had no contact with regular worship. This increased the numbers of regular worshippers. The last incumbent together with the PCC held an away day in June 2008 to consider the potential way ahead. A number of ideas emerged, and three themes were emphasised:

1. Children and Youth

There is a real desire to have young people play a more active part in the services and for them to be more fully integrated into the worshipping community. This may involve being a bit more flexible at times in our style of worship. Steps to this end are already under way with the monthly all-age service. Our junior choir has taken up a role in this service.

2. Spiritual Reality

A number of ideas were floated to increase the depth both of our community and spirituality. We are perhaps not doing all we need to do in terms of pastoring and discipleship. The need for more small groups and house groups is keenly felt. This is something that will need ongoing work.

3. Reaching Out

A number of ways were explored in which we could become better at reaching out to those beyond our church community. Improving the quality of our welcome and information provided to newcomers was felt to be important, as was improving our communication as a parish. We seek to find and support events that will be attractive to those on the fringe of the church.

The last incumbent and the PCC were pretty much of one mind on the need for the above changes. Most of them emerged from the PCC itself on a day that saw a lot of prayer, thought and discussion. The level of support and enthusiasm in the church for moving forward is also quite marked at the moment, although some members of the church are perhaps nervous of what some of the changes might mean. It is a time of growth, change and challenge in St Michael's.

C. NEW INCUMBENT PROFILE

- **An experienced parish priest, approachable and warm-hearted.**
- **A person of prayer with an engaging spirituality, who can enable, unify and encourage laity.**
- **A leader with a collaborative style committed to working with children and young people.**
- **A person able to develop outreach within the church community and the wider parish, in a creative and imaginative way.**

D. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE



The Vicarage

The vicarage was built in the 1920s and has a utility room, kitchen, dining room, lounge, study and toilet downstairs and five bedrooms and a bathroom upstairs. It has a large garden and an orchard, which are maintained by the incumbent.

The Pleasance (a small grassed area including a fenced pond), and the paddock (a large maintained field), which are adjacent to the vicarage, are licensed to the County Council by the Diocese for use by St Michael's School from 9 a.m. till 5 p.m. on

weekdays during term time only. The parish uses this facility for parish picnics and a bonfire party. The parish has no responsibility for their maintenance.



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