



# *The Diocese of St Albans*

*Living God's Love*

## **PARISH PROFILE FOR**

## **THE BENEFICES OF ST JAMES CHURCH, BIDDENHAM AND ALL SAINTS CHURCH, KEMPSTON (HELD IN PLURALITY)**

### **Living to love God and serve our local communities**

Thank you for considering our benefices - we are grateful for your interest. First of all, can we show you a little of whom we are in a couple of photos?



Carols in the Churchyard at St James



## 1 *Summary*

We are benefices in a period of transition:

- For years we have been two comfortable, warm parishes having many admirable features and serving an area of settled housing.
- We have been caring communities with a faithful core of members and full churches at the Christian festivals. We have had well maintained churches and a strong choral Eucharistic culture and active Sunday schools.
- But the world around us has changed. We are now surrounded by areas of new-build estates and a new village populated largely by un-churched residents looking for community. More generally we have an increasingly secular and consumerist culture where the preferred activities on Sundays do not include going to church. People have little knowledge of the Christian faith and therefore reject its validity.

We recognise that we have to change:

- We need, with the help of our Vicar, to learn more about our faith and to increase our commitment to Jesus Christ and knowing Him as Lord and Master, so that we can take the Gospel out both into our traditional areas and into the new-build estates.
- We must develop an enthusiasm about our faith; otherwise nobody will listen to us.
- We have to train and work with our Vicar and our Church Army Community Ministers so we are effective in doing this task.
- We have to order our church so that what goes on is understandable to people with an interest in the faith.
- To do all this we seek a visionary leader who is a Bible based teacher, who is passionate about mission and who will encourage us, challenge us and walk with us during the highs and lows of this project, so that we once again have churches full of people who know why they are worshipping our Father God.

*If you share this vision, please contact us!  
Meanwhile please read our Parish Profile below.*

## 2 *Our church today and our vision of what can be*



A Friends event at St James

- The members of our two churches are happy to belong to loving and hospitable communities where people who are community minded and who care for each other gladly come together to worship.
- Both churches have a tradition of good music and of social contact with people way outside the church community.
- The churches have well designed and active websites where you can find much more information:

<http://www.stjamesbiddenham.com/> and

<http://www.allsaintskempston.com/>

- St James church has a large and lively Sunday school and Bible teaching also takes place in the midweek Bible study and prayer groups and in the men's groups. These take place in people's homes - many of the members are not churchgoers.
- In Biddenham and Great Denham there is a joint village and church journal, 'The Loop', which is read by over 350 households.

However, we have challenges:

In drawing people to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and sharing God's love in the community.

- As with all other churches, we are faced with an increasingly secular culture, seven day working patterns and the problems of engaging with people and building Christian community in our large new-build areas.



Carols in the Churchyard 2015

- Many at **St James** have an issue with the Sunday service at 9.00am, which is relatively inaccessible to older people and to commuters who, every weekday, have to get up before 6.00am.
- At **All Saints** there is a diminishing and ageing congregation with limited finances. We are keen to have help from a new Vicar to encourage younger families, in order to increase and invigorate our congregation.

So our vision for the future starts with us:

- We need to grow in and better understand our faith.
- We are looking for a Vicar who is a prayerful, Bible based teacher who will explain and apply the message about Jesus Christ with sensitivity and understanding of peoples' needs and nurture the church community as it grows in depth and breadth.
- We would like to work with a warm, visionary leader who will support and encourage the church family in change and share our enthusiasm for mission.
- We are ready to play our full part both in developing networks of relationships in the community, which will open doors to evangelism, and in the running of the programmes in the church. To do this we seek a Vicar who is a motivator of people to help in building the existing committed and collaborative lay teams.
- To further develop our children's work we need a Vicar who empathises with children and, while nurturing people in their own ministry, directs the programme within the overall mission of the church.

As we develop this work,

- We have faith that people who previously had no Christian background will come into our community as believers.
- Until now almost all worship has involved robed and relatively formal Eucharists. However, to welcome and engage these people, we seek a Vicar who is willing to be flexible in the forms and times of worship, thus reflecting the needs of the congregations.
- We would like, with our new Vicar, to explore imaginative approaches to 'doing church'.
- A large amount of the work in the



Baptism at All Saints

benefices will be done by members of our congregations, including our Church Army Community Ministers and Readers, with the guidance of our Vicar.

- We will value help and training from our Vicar in applying our gifts in the service of the Gospel.



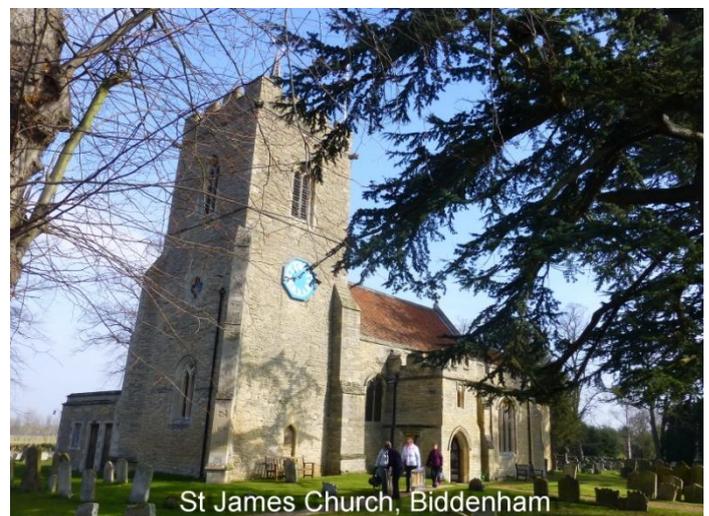
The band for Carols in the Churchyard

### 3 *So where does all this happen?*

The benefices are just to the west of Bedford. St James church is situated in Church End, Biddenham, MK40 4AS and All Saints church is in Church End, Kempston, MK43 8RH. There are small squares outside each church offering limited parking. St James church serves the village of Biddenham, much of which is a conservation area, the modern estate of Deep Spinney (which sits within the village), the new village of Great Denham and the new development (yet to be built) north of the A4280. All Saints church serves a rural and urban area to the west of Kempston and a new-build area called West Kempston.

#### 3a) *The Parish of St James, Biddenham*

The village of Biddenham is an ancient settlement mentioned in the Domesday Book, whereas Deep Spinney is a relatively recent development which has now bedded down well. Great Denham and the new development north of the A4280 are large, new-build estates with all the excitement of starting a new community and the difficulties of building a neighbourhood identity. Our Church Army Community Ministers are taking a vital role in this task.



St James Church, Biddenham

In recent years the population of the parish has grown to around 4,500, though with the new-build developments it will, in time, exceed 7,000 residents. Both Biddenham and Great Denham have their own civil Parish Councils, which sit under the umbrella authority of Bedford Borough Council.

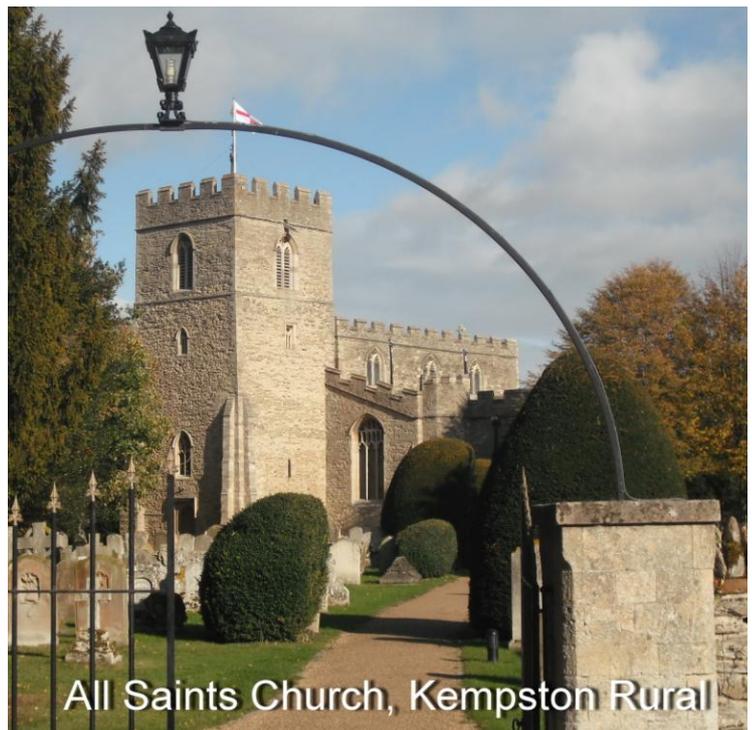
In Biddenham village there are properties of all sizes and from every period, including large mansions and well maintained thatched cottages. Much of the village population is relatively wealthy. Deep Spinney has rather smaller houses and a somewhat younger population and the two new-build areas have a varied mix of houses, of which about 20% is social housing. The population is much younger there, with many children. This is reflected in our Sunday school of 18 children and a relatively rapid reduction of the average age in our congregation.

There is a church school ([www.stjamesvalower.org.uk](http://www.stjamesvalower.org.uk)) with good links with St James church and a strongly secular state upper school with a history of involvement with the arts and sport and a multicultural pupil population. There is also a Catholic middle school in the village which, like the church school, receives complimentary Ofsted reports. Great Denham has its own primary school which is allied to the Biddenham upper school and it is planned to build a primary school in the new-build north of the A4280.

### ***3b) The Parish of All Saints, Kempston***

Kempston grew from small, Saxon, beginnings into its present urban town (population c.25,000) and rural district (population c.1,500).

The parish of All Saints is a blend of an urban community, which contains some quite deprived areas, and a rural community, which includes more affluent housing and some farms. There is a broad mix of housing, age groups and aspirations. It has a population of over 7,000 and is still increasing. Many Kempstonians have lived in the parish for generations, but some have moved in more recently and include those from various ethnic backgrounds. There is now



a substantial new housing development in the parish. 1,260 homes are being built in West Kempston, of which over 1,000 are already finished, and a further 46 homes have been built at Kempston Mill.

Many people work locally, but a great many commute to places such as London, Northampton and Milton Keynes. Civic responsibility lies with Kempston Rural Parish Council, Kempston Town Council and Bedford Borough Council.

In September 2014 the Kempston Rural Lower School, near to the church, moved to a greatly expanded new school in the new housing area. There are three other schools in the parish of All

Saints: Balliol Lower School, Robert Bruce Middle School and Hastingsbury Upper School. There have been various links between the churches and these schools, but by far the strongest links have been with Kempston Rural Lower School, with regular assemblies and Open the Book, although this is now waning since the school moved. The old Rural School building is now occupied by a nursery school called Tiddlywinks which opened in November 2015. The nursery accepts children from birth to age 5 and is gradually growing in numbers. The Community Ministers have links with Balliol Lower School and the relocated Kempston Rural Lower School, where they visit regularly for assembly, talks and presentations.

### 3c) *Bedford*

Biddenham and Kempston are just to the west of Bedford, a peaceful multicultural town which is happy to be so and celebrates this nature with many restaurants serving ethnic food and an ethnically diverse cultural programme. There is the usual range of supermarkets including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose, Morrisons, Lidl and Aldi. Bedford has been found to be the most generous town in the UK for charitable giving. The Bedford fringe is the third largest fringe theatre festival in the UK after those in Edinburgh and Brighton. The Philharmonia Orchestra has a residency in the town and there are two excellent theatres, a concert venue and good pub music. There are four other concert halls within 30 miles where one can find classical and popular music, jazz, opera and many styles of plays.

For sporting activity there are gyms, swimming pools and an international athletics stadium at which Olympic athletes train. Bedford has an established rowing community, one of the largest regattas in the UK and a spectacular biennial River Festival. There is dinghy sailing at Priory Marina and also nearby at Marston and Stewartby lakes. The town is also home to the famous Bedford Blues rugby team.

Bedford has excellent transport links. The recently opened final link of the bypass has been a great boon. There are fast trains to London, taking about 40 minutes, and good direct connections south with Brighton and to northern cities. It is close to the M1 and the A1(M) and is within easy reach of Luton, Gatwick and Stansted airports, with a direct train line to Luton and Gatwick.

There is a wide range of nurseries and lower schools as well as several renowned independent schools, excellent state upper schools, a free school, a university and an excellent community college.

Due to all these factors, the benefices cover a rapidly growing area with a dynamic feel. It is on the banks of the River Ouse with a riverside country park, playing fields, tennis courts and a cycle path on which one can ride for 15 miles alongside the river. Together with the history of the old village of Biddenham, the settled area of Kempston and the excitement and challenge of the new-build areas make the benefices a good place to live.

## 4 *Facts and figures for our churches*

### 4a) *St James Church*

#### (i) *Church Services*

At present these are as follows:

- Sunday Eucharist at 9.00am with the first Sunday in each month being a Family Service. These services are supported by an excellent choir.
- First and third Sunday, 6.00pm Eucharist – with quarterly services designated as (a) Healing or (b) Celtic Evening Prayer.
- Baptisms (when required) form an integral part of the morning service on the third Sunday of each month.
- The Explorers (St James's Sunday School) meet in the Church Barn and join the church service at the distribution of Communion for a blessing at the Altar. At the end of the church service the Explorers present to the congregation what they have learned that day. The Explorers take the lead at special services such as Mothering Sunday, Christingle and the Nativity. On the first Sunday of the month, the Explorers give a short presentation and also lead the congregation in prayers.
- St James' School has special (non-Eucharistic) services to coincide with the end of term or special events – generally the school is responsible for preparing the content of the service, in consultation with the Vicar. Once a term they join the church for an 'all age' service.



#### (ii) *Congregation*

The current Electoral Roll lists 89 parishioners. The average numbers attending services during 2015 were:

- Sunday morning service: 34 (the low numbers during the Easter and summer holidays bring the average figure down).
- Mothering Sunday: 64.
- Easter Sunday: 71.
- 'Carols in the Churchyard', Christmas Eve: 525.
- Midnight Mass, Christmas Eve: 63.
- Christmas morning: 77.

### ***(iii) Occasional Offices***

- Baptisms: average numbers are 7-8 per year.
- Weddings: the average is 4-5 per year.
- Funerals: approximately 10 (*burials or interments of ashes*) per year.

### ***(iv) Midweek and outreach groups***

- Bible study and prayer group: this meets every two weeks and is currently studying the Acts of the Apostles. Each meeting starts with a meal and ends with prayer. The membership is 18.
- Men's group: this meets every month and is currently studying St John's Gospel. Membership is 18 and most of the men don't yet come to church. Each meeting starts with a meal.
- Curry club: this outreach group meets monthly and involves a pint at a pub then a curry at a restaurant. Membership is 10 people.
- There is a Lent course each year for the two parishes. This year we are studying the Psalms.
- A small group of parishioners is going to Spring Harvest this year.

### ***(v) Lay Team***

The licensed lay team, jointly shared with All Saints, comprises:

- Two part time Church Army Community Ministers.
- One full time lay Reader and a shared lay Reader.

The unlicensed team includes:

- A convenor and parents who teach in the Sunday school.
- A leader of the midweek meetings.
- The Chaplain to the East of England Ambulance Service.
- The congregation, who play an active role in the readings and prayers and as servers at communion. There is also a large commitment to social activities, flower arranging etc.

### ***(vi) Churchyard***

A new addition to the churchyard (located to the north of the church) is now used for burials, with cremated remains still being buried around the edge of the existing churchyard.

### ***(vii) Finance***

- The proposed budget for 2016 is £63,580.
- The Parish Share for 2015 (£35,705) was paid in full.
- The Friends of St James provides financial support on a range of projects for the benefit of the church.

## **4b) All Saints Church**

### **(i) Church services**



On Sunday there is:

- A Family Eucharist on the first Sunday of the month.
- Baptisms are held, during the service, on the third Sunday of the month.
- A traditional Eucharist at 10.30am.

Vestments are worn at the Eucharist and the Blessed Sacrament is reserved at All

Saints church. The Parish Eucharist in the morning has the Junior Church joining before the Communion. The Eucharist has an 'all age' flavour on the first Sunday of the month, with a shorter and simpler Order of Service, with either a talk from the clergy or a presentation from the young people.

On Sunday evenings, there is:

- Either Evensong or a Taize service on the second Sunday of the month.
- Special services on All Souls for bereaved families.

There is also:

- An Advent Carol Service, a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols, a children's Nativity and a Christingle service with the Church of the Transfiguration, Kempston at Christmas.
- In January there is a service for wedding couples.
- A Harvest service.
- A monthly Eucharist at St John's Homes in Kempston.
- We also take Communion from the reserved Sacrament on a regular basis to those who are sick.
- The Vicar is ex-officio member of the committee of St John's Home Trust, there are 19 flats/bedsits. The residents are mainly from the parishes of All Saints and the Church of the Transfiguration. The Vicar takes it in turn with the Vicar of the Church of the Transfiguration to be chairperson.

### **(ii) Congregation**

The Electoral Roll presently numbers 59 parishioners. The average Sunday attendance is 28 adults and 2-3 children. The congregation is ageing and the numbers are diminishing, although we do have a number of younger members.

***(iii) Occasional Offices***

In 2015, there were:

- 11 baptisms.
- 12 weddings.
- 25 funerals.

***(iv) Midweek and outreach groups***

- The Natter Club meets every third Thursday of the month in the church hall.
- There is a parish lunch out every third Wednesday of the month at various local pubs.
- The Lent course and autumn study course are held jointly with St James church.

***(v) Lay team***

The All Saints and St James joint lay team currently consists of:

- A retired Reader.
- A Reader who is shared with another parish.
- The Community Ministers, who share their work.

In addition the congregation plays a large part in the readings and prayers and in acting as servers at communion. They also take an active role in social activities, flower arranging etc.

***(vi) Churchyard***

The Churchyard was closed in the 1870s and its maintenance is now the responsibility of Kempston Rural Parish Council, who carries out that responsibility diligently.

***(vii) Finance***

- The proposed budget for 2016 is £42,300.
- The Parish Share for 2015 was £32,365 of which 70% was paid.

***4c) In both St James and All Saints***

In both churches we have an organ and piano for our music and both have a choir. Both churches use Hymns Ancient and Modern and the Book of Common Prayer.

There has been a recent quinquennial inspection at both churches, when no major problems were identified.

In both churches the Vicar's expenses are paid in full and he or she is encouraged to take appropriate study leave.

## 5 *Buildings*

### 5a) *St James church and barn*

There has been a church in Biddenham since the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The present building consists of a central nave and chancel, a porch, north and south aisles and a west tower, the latest addition being the vestry in 1974. Some stained glass windows were installed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and there are two modern stained glass windows. The interior of the church contains fine examples from the Arts and Crafts movement. There have been bells in the tower since the 16<sup>th</sup> century but the present eight bells date from 1787 with later additions. They are rung by a small, experienced, team on special occasions.

The inside of the church was redecorated in 2014 and the organ was renovated and upgraded in 2009-10. On the walls of the church are many memorials. There are some brasses and near the chancel is a striking Jacobean wall monument.

The church is on the edge of the village and stands in its own churchyard. A new area has recently been purchased to accept new burials. The churchyard is surrounded by trees with two very large cedars. In 1978 a barn was purchased adjacent to the church and this provides a venue for the Explorers group on Sundays and for most of the church's social activities. There is adequate parking outside the church and along Church End.

### 5b) *All Saints church and hall*

The church dates from about 1099 but, apart from the addition in 1823 of a mausoleum on the north side of the chancel which now serves as a vestry, the exterior of the building appears much as it did by the end of the 1500s. Internally, the building has had various alterations since the



second Victorian refurbishment of the very late 1800s, but its appearance now is basically as then, except that the Rood Screen and Reredos were removed in the 1970s to make the chancel and small sanctuary more open to view. The choir now sits, facing inwards, at the front of the nave. There are ten bells in the tower and these are rung regularly by a dedicated team of ringers.

The nearby church hall, which was built in the mid 1970s, is in good condition. During the last five years it has had a new boiler installed, new windows fitted and has been internally redecorated. There is a church car park approximately 150 metres from the church with spaces for at least 50 cars, plus a small car park at the church hall.

### 5c) *The Vicarage*

The Vicarage is in a rural location, close to All Saints church in Kempston. The 1970s building is a detached, two storey, brick, purpose built vicarage comprising an entrance lobby, a separate study with its own cloakroom, a small lounge (which could be used as a dining room or personal study), a large lounge, a kitchen/diner, four bedrooms (all with washbasins), family bathroom and a separate toilet. Hot water and central heating is by oil fired boiler. The Vicarage has recently been renovated with a heavily insulated roof, which has made the house much warmer and more comfortable. The large garden is mainly laid to lawn. There are two garages and parking for a further three cars.

## 6 *Conclusion*

We hope you enjoyed reading this Parish Profile and are attracted to learn more about the benefices of St James and All Saints. Is this an opportunity for you? We look forward to hearing from you in due course.

## 7 *Contacts*

For more information, please contact any of those named below:

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