

The Parishes of Longnor, Quarnford, Sheen, and Warslow with Elkstones, Newtown and Reapsmoor,

in the beautiful Staffordshire Moorlands of the Peak District National Park, the Stafford Episcopal Area, Diocese of Lichfield.

A rural benefice, the population doesn't exceed much more than 1,500 people – a remarkably small number of people spread over an extremely large rural landscape. Due to the geographical spread, access to a car would be essential: Longnor is 4 miles from Sheen, 5.5 from Quarnford, 6 from Warslow, and 8 from Elkstones. The largest town, Longnor, is home to 334 people (2011 Census), with Warslow lagging just behind at 320.

This doesn't tell the whole story, though, as the villages are swelled by holiday makers in the summer months, living in the many holiday cottages that are both an economic necessity but also the reason that many youngsters can't afford to live in the villages where they grew up.

The primary industry is farming and associated agricultural work. People are employed in the hospitality industry, though this can be seasonal. There are a good number of people who work from home in a variety of industries.

All the villages are picture-postcard perfect. Longnor especially is a beautiful settlement, officially a town (it has a market hall and charter), with winding passages and an uncluttered market place.



Buxton, Ashbourne, Leek, and Bakewell are all nearby towns which are easily accessible by car, with Manchester, Stockport, Sheffield, Lichfield, Stafford and Stoke-on-Trent being within an hours drive.



Buses run through Longnor and Warslow frequently to both Buxton and Ashbourne, and weekly to Leek.

The majority of people living in the benefice are of good yeoman farming-stock, with some retired from the services and professions.

The shops in the benefice are mainly concentrated in Longnor, which boasts a Post Office (which also sells fresh fruit and vegetables), a general store (which sells everything, from bread and milk to wine and whiskey), a craft centre (which also houses a café), a café, and a fish and chip shop, with a café inside. It also has two pubs, one of which serves food. We are well catered for!

At 1518 feet above sea level, Flash, the main village in the parish of Quarnford is the highest village in Britain – just beating the village of Wanlockhead in Dumfries and Galloway in to second place. Its remote location at the confluence of three counties means that it has had an interesting past – it was known for its counterfeiting of coins in the 18th/19th Centuries (and where the saying “flashing your cash” comes from). Besides the farming and hospitality, Flash is home to a brewery.

Elkstones and Longnor are the smallest village and town in the Diocese.

The Churches

There are seven churches in the benefice: Warslow and Elkstones have only just joined the long-established group of five. I am the first incumbent of the newly shaped benefice, and so this is an exciting time as we knit together these communities.



Each of the church buildings is unique, though naturally there are similarities that have evolved due to their links. Their congregations are just as unique.

Quarnford is a Book of Common Prayer church, whilst Newtown prefers Taize-style worship; Sheen was built as an Anglo-Catholic outpost (and from whose pulpit Dr Pusey preached¹), though it is much more middle-of-the-road now, in line with the others.

Elkstones was built in 1788 and contains the original double-decker pulpit, box pews, and (I would argue) the narrowest Altar in Christendom, all in a tiny but perfectly formed building.

¹ Although, to be fair, that was when the pulpit was in it's original home of All Saints Margaret Street in London!

The church at Reapsmoor began life as a hay barn, but was converted in the early 19th Century to house a church upstairs, a schoolroom downstairs, and a teacher's cottage semi-detached at one end. It's a delight to lead worship in, with its clear glass windows and elevated position affording uninterrupted views across the landscape.

None of the buildings are older than the 1700's, though Christianity in this area can be traced back to Anglo-Saxon times: St Bartholomew's Church in Longnor was originally dedicated to St Bertram, a local saint of the 8th Century who had lived in these parts, though the only thing which remains from the church of those days is the font, the rest being rebuilt in the Georgian period.

All of them are loved and well cared-for by both the church congregations and the community at large, who see them as vital parts of the village. Most of them are open during the hours of daylight, and are frequently visited.

The congregations are welcoming and enthusiastic, though small in number.

Electoral roll numbers are small, in line with population sizes of the villages. Longnor, for example, has an electoral roll of 30. But that is in a village of 334: whilst small, the electoral roll is actually quite a good percentage of the population! A funeral, too, is a community event – I think that I have yet to conduct a funeral with less than 200 in the congregation.



All of this variety would equip a curate with skills for future ministry, wherever and whatever form it might take.

Because we are still knitting the new benefice together, the worship pattern is still being developed as the new benefice is shaped.

At the moment three churches have a Eucharist each Sunday and then another three the next Sunday – I am also in the process of developing a lay team who will be able to lead morning or evening prayer at other churches so that we can work towards an act of worship each week in every church. Their training is something which I would hope a Curate could be involved in.

Currently there is only one weekday service, on a Thursday morning at Newtown Church: this service is greatly appreciated, and often there are more worshippers there on a Thursday than on a Sunday

In my first three months here I have conducted 5 funerals and 4 baptisms. I have three weddings booked in for later in the year. Despite the numbers in the village being small, people still consider the villages home: people come back for special services, and the open graveyards mean that villagers who have lived elsewhere can still come back for their funeral.

I say morning and evening prayer daily, and would expect a curate to join me – at least most days. I generally say morning prayer at home and evening prayer in one of the churches – I would be more than willing to negotiate times and places with a curate. My intention is to establish a pattern where others can join us.

There are three Church of England primary schools in the benefice, each unique and each providing different opportunities. I would encourage a curate to serve on the Governors for one of them.

There is a lot of isolation amongst the farmers and the elderly – one of my main ministries in this parish so far has been visiting, and it is genuinely appreciated.

There is only one other place of worship in the benefice: a Methodist Chapel in the village of Hollinsclough. I have begun to establish some connections with both the Methodist Minister and the Roman Catholic Priest in Leek (who's parish extends to cover most of this benefice) with the hopes of mutual prayer and joint working on some projects.



The incumbent is the Revd Fr John Baines.

I've only been in post since Easter 2018, so I'm fairly new to the Benefice. However I am really enjoying getting to know the area and the people who make up these villages. I've found them incredibly welcoming, and am really glad to have moved here.

Prior to this I was incumbent of St George's Church, New Mills, for twelve years. This was a single parish benefice in a town of around 9,000 people, and the church was at the heart of the community. It hosted the food bank, a monthly community meal attracting between 130 – 170 people each month.

Whilst Vicar, I was also Rural Dean for several years, and also a Police Chaplain. For the last six years of my incumbency I was also Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands.

During my time there I have trained two Assistant Curates: one man, and one woman. I was also involved in the training of others by offering placement opportunities.

I have an interest in Liturgy; in making the culturally relevant; and in Rural Ministry. Beyond the church, I have several hobbies and interests, including collecting and restoring vintage typewriters and telephone exchanges.

One of the things that attracted me to come this benefice was their parish profile,



which said that they wanted their new Vicar to help them use their buildings, skills, finances and people to help the local communities. We are just starting down this pathway and discerning what it might involve. At the moment none of the PCCs have a Mission Action Plan: we are going to work on a benefice MAP and link that in to parish MAPs during the autumn/winter of this year.

My vision and priorities are also still developing; however I have already identified a need for Bible Study and Christian education amongst the existing congregations, and building up their confidence to share their faith. The buildings also need some tender loving care. My major priority, however, is to help the congregations and villages to shape the new benefice – and, whilst doing that, to keep in mind their declared vision of wanting to help their local communities. Mission and Vision are high on the agenda of each PCC.

I promise not to consider a curate to be another pair of hands or a helper: I understand that a curacy is a time of learning.

Whilst in the Diocese of Derby I was a T.I. for two different curates, one male, one female. I also hosted several curates, readers, and those seeking a path towards ministry for six-week placements. Serving as Assistant Diocesan Director of Ordinands in that diocese, I kept abreast of developments and training requirements, from pre-selection and in to CME 1-4. I continue to seek out opportunities for my own training and development.

I am calm and approachable; liturgically both astute and creative; willing to encourage, whilst also willing to offer challenges. I am able to allow a curate to experiment whilst also offering boundaries and a safety net.

I find the training of curates stimulating and invigorating, and that it encourages me to reflect on the “who, what, why, when, where” of my own ministry, so that I can learn from a curate as they learn from me.

Both of the curates and each of the ‘others’ that I have trained have been different: all have required care and attention in different areas: at each stage of their journeys, I have attempted to find the ‘easy win’ for their encouragement, whilst also challenging them to reach for the thing which they consider might be just beyond their grasp.

Lastly, though I set high standards, I would not expect anything of another that I do not expect of myself.

Nature of post

Please tick which are applicable:

- Training post for deacon who expects to be ordained priest
- Training post for permanent deacon

What sort of person are we seeking:

Either a man or a woman who wants to learn the craft of Priesthood in one of the most beautiful parts of the Church of England.

The likely role of a Curate here...

In my short time here I have already discerned some areas which need time and energy, and within which a curate could contribute and grow, e.g.: discipleship of the current congregations; finding ways of discretely tackling the poverty in the area which allows the village pride to be unharmed; easing the loneliness of many of the elderly in the area; helping the children in the three church schools to encounter Christianity in a lively and sustaining way, and as something which they can *own* beyond their childhood.

Importantly, the pace of life here is slightly slower. This means that there is time and space for learning to take place.

Having said that, we are on the edge of towns such as Buxton, Leek, and Bakewell, and the cities of Derby, Sheffield, and Manchester are all within



striking distance, which offer places for recreation and relaxation beyond the parish boundaries.

The University of Derby has a campus in Buxton, and may offer opportunity for 'sixth-day' enrichment as a chaplain; there is also good work going on with Farming Life Chaplains. We are close enough to the cities for a placement as a Hospital Chaplain to be found. I am on good terms with many clergy in the vicinity who minister in different contexts – from civic churches in large market towns, to those with a rich choral tradition, and those who engage in Healing Ministry. Placements could easily be arranged in these if suitable.

Accommodation

The Diocese would purchase a house for a Stipendiary Curate in line with Diocesan guidelines.

Finally...

We are a rural multi-parish benefice, along with most of the country.

Establishing this new benefice is an exciting time for a curate to join us and to help shape the future, and within the benefice we embody a variety of styles of worship. All of this variety would equip a curate with skills for future ministry, wherever and whatever form it might take.

The villages are small and friendly, and it would be easy for a curate to know and become known: personal contact is highly valued, both by the regular congregations and the others who live in the parish (an excellent habit for a Priest to form!).

I am thankful that my own curacy was spent in a benefice such as this: it helped form my ministry in positive ways, giving me skills that served me well in both single and multi-parish contexts.

Who should be contacted in the first instance:

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