



All Saints, Mears Ashby



Ss Peter and Paul, Sywell



St. Leonard, Hardwick



St. Nicholas, Overstone.

The Benefice of Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone

The Benefice

Our Benefice is in the Deanery of Wellingborough and comprises the three parishes of Mears Ashby, Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone. It was formed in 1992 and then comprised four parishes - Sywell and Overstone were then two parishes which amalgamated in 2007. The Benefice is mainly rural in character. However Overstone, due to its proximity to the large village of Moulton and the town of Northampton, has become less rural over the years and this will increase due to the proposed development of Overstone Leys and the increase in housing to the North of Northampton.

We are situated between the County town of Northampton and the market town of Wellingborough. The large villages of Earls Barton to the south and Moulton to the east are easily accessible. All large supermarkets, banks, building societies, take-away and fast food facilities are within easy reach, together with doctors' surgeries, chemists and the two General Hospitals at Kettering and Northampton. Although we have no Secondary Schools in the Benefice itself, there are many County Secondary Schools in Wellingborough, Wollaston, Moulton, Northampton and Kettering. The Church School of Bishop Stopford is also situated in Kettering.

Wellingborough is on the main railway line into London St. Pancras, Northampton trains go via Milton Keynes to Euston. We are within easy reach of the M1 to the south and the A14 to the north.

There are a number of local Sports Clubs offering a range of sports - athletics, swimming, bowls, archery, golf, judo, tae kwon do, etc in Kettering, Corby, Wellingborough and Northampton. We are well represented by our Rugby, Football and Cricket teams - Northampton Saints RFC, Northampton Town FC (Cobblers) and Northampton Steelbacks.



- Hardwick is a rural hamlet of 29 dwellings and 70 people with a parish Church and Village Hall.
- Mears Ashby is a village of 473 (2011 census) with the parish Church at its centre, a CEVA Primary school, Village Hall and Public House (the Griffin's Head).
- Sywell has a population of 800 comprising the Old Village with the parish Church, ribbon development on three roads, CEVA primary school, Sywell Aerodrome with Motel, function rooms and Industrial Estate, Overstone Solarium Park - a residential caravan site having its own shop, swimming pool and squash club, Overstone Park Pub/Restaurant, Sywell Country Park, Sywell Grange Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- Overstone is a ribbon development village, adjoining Sywell, of some 750 people with the Church of St. Nicholas, a village shop and post office (newspaper delivery), Village Hall, County Primary School and Overstone Country Club, which has a Golf Course, residential property and gym.

Commerce & Industry

There is flourishing industry of all types on Sywell Aerodrome including the Blades Aerobatic Team, Sywell Aviation Museum, haulage companies, and mechanics. Park Farm Industry at Wellingborough is situated about 1½ miles north-east of Mears Ashby just off the road to Hardwick.

Health Care

Although there are no doctors' surgeries or health centres in the Benefice, all aspects of health care, including pharmacies, dentists etc are available in Moulton, Earls Barton, Mawsley Village, Northampton, Wellingborough and Kettering.

The Vicarage at 46 Wellingborough Road, Mears Ashby, Northampton NN6 0DZ is a West-facing detached two storey house built in the 1970s and subsequently extended. It has brick-faced cavity external walls, concrete ground floor, timber first floor and tiled timber-framed pitched roofs and is well-maintained. It was decorated externally in 2015. It comprises four bedrooms, bathroom and landing to the first floor with entrance hall, kitchen, dining room, living room, study and cloakroom to the ground floor. There is an integral single garage and attached store with good-sized gardens to the front and rear with parking for three cars.



Vision and Mission

Both Mears Ashby and Hardwick churches are rooted in the traditional form of worship based on the Book of Common Prayer. They are not adverse to some more modern forms of worship but use books or service sheets.

Sywell and Overstone prefer the more contemporary form of worship introduced by our former Incumbent and use Power Point and taped music on a regular basis.

We wish to see our churches continuing as the spiritual heart of our villages and being used regularly for worship and private prayers. Although at present our churches are locked during the day we would like to see them open at all times.

We wish to continue working together as a Benefice and although we would prefer to continue to keep our individual PCCs at present would welcome the reintroduction of regular Benefice meetings. These used to be held every quarter until 2010 and have been held only intermittently since, although we are meeting now on a regular basis during this Interregnum.

Areas for development

We need to improve our outreach in all respects, in particular meeting and responding quickly to the needs of our immediate community.

The encouragement of “one-off” members of the congregation (baptism families and weddings) has been very poor in the past few years and we need to strengthen this.

The low level of stewardship across the Benefice needs to be improved.

The support given to our schools can be encouraged by the new Incumbent being able to adapt to their individual needs.

We feel strongly that our (currently) ageing congregation has its own needs and is equally as important to the life of our churches as young families and children.

Person Profile

We would like a person who :

- is of central churchmanship and will happily lead both traditional and contemporary styles of worship;
- is open to the Holy Spirit and will preach biblically;
- will demonstrate excellent time management and organisational skills- with the professionalism to maintain confidentiality;
- has the skill to communicate and delegate efficiently through personal contact and via social media where appropriate;
- will fully involve all parishioners to maximise their talents;
- will be sympathetic and understanding to the needs of rural ministry and willing to get involved in all aspects of village life whilst understanding the importance of being visible;
- will be open and inclusive, willing to compromise where necessary, with a good sense of humour and a deep-seated faith that will not be upset by those of a non-orthodox belief;
- will follow the Lectionary whilst being able to adapt preaching to suit different occasions;
- will encourage a strong music ministry;
- will treat men, women and children with equal respect;
- will increase the Church's visibility in our schools and work towards better outreach in our community.

Current Service Pattern

Sunday Church Services				
	All Saints, Mears Ashby	St Leonard's, Hardwick	SS. Peter & Paul, Sywell	St Nicholas, Overstone
First		9:00 a.m Holy Communion	11.00 a.m Morning Worship	
Second		9:00 a.m Matins	11.00 a.m Lord's Supper	
Third	9:00 a.m Holy Communion		11.00 a.m Lord's Supper	
Fourth	9:00 a.m Holy Communion	3:00 p.m BCP Evensong		11.00 a.m All Age Worship
Fifth	9:00 a.m Benefice Service			

This service pattern has been in use for several years - coffee is served from 10.30am at Sywell and Overstone. Prior to 2015 the Benefice services were taken by each Church in turn. Each Wednesday there is a said Holy Communion service at St Nicholas', Overstone.

Mr. Tony Edwards, a former resident of Hardwick and one of Hardwick's Churchwardens, has recently started a Benefice choir which has sung at Christmas Carol services and at the January Benefice service.

Our Parishes

Hardwick



Welcome to the Profile for the Parish of Hardwick. We hope that you will gain an insight into this very special village, its beautiful church and its small but close knit community.

Description of the Parish

Hardwick Village comprises 29 dwellings, housing 63 adults and 7 children. In addition to there are two farms to the north west of the village,



Grange and Lodge Farm, and Hardwick Lodge Cottages on the lane to the A43.

Furthermore, Merrydales lies to the east of the village on the lane to Niort Way and Appleby Barn lies to the south opposite Moonshine Gap. These properties all fall within the parish boundary and accommodate a further 11 residents. All properties are privately owned with the exception of three in the ownership of the local authority.

Wellingborough Borough Council has designated Hardwick a Conservation Village given its delightful aspect and the residents are very proud of this status. There is a strong community spirit which is demonstrated by the fact that almost every household takes a turn to mow the village green and the churchyard several times a year. Indeed many of the residents, even those who might only go to church at Christmas, help to maintain the church garden on a regular basis and will offer to help on our twice yearly church work days.

Sadly what the village lacks are families with young children. A high proportion, just under 50% of the adult residents are retired and whilst there are two properties currently on the market it is hoped but not to be assumed that the new occupants will change this.

The Church owns the only village amenity, the village hall. The PCC work very hard to organise fund raising events during the year which have the dual purpose of providing a social forum for the residents, their families and friends, whilst raising much needed funds to pay our Parish Share and maintain the church building and fabric and the village hall.



During the last 12 months we have held a number of Saturday coffee mornings, an Italian themed evening, a Mexican themed evening, a quiz Night with Fish & chips, a number of themed Beetle Drives aimed at the younger members of our community, a Bridge Drive, a Summer Fete, a Harvest Supper & Auction, a Christmas Tree Festival, and a Concert for organ and voice in the church. On occasions residents have given over their gardens or homes and sometimes both, to host a Pudding Evening, BBQ or Hog Roast and Jazz afternoon. All of these events have been well supported and the PCC counts itself fortunate to be able to rely upon a number of villagers and friends to organise, cook, and provide much needed help.

We have no church magazine. Instead we have a joint publication with Mears Ashby titled Village Life which is produced every two months. This magazine aims to promote the community spirit within both villages, and allows the PCC to advertise and report on any events which may be taking place. There is a regular Vicar's Letter feature and a note of Church Services. Church Cleaning and Village and Churchyard Mowing Rotas are also listed.

As we have no village newsagent. Our newspapers are delivered from Wellingborough into the church porch on a daily basis - yet another example of the church being at the heart of our community.

St Leonard's Church



St Leonard's Church, which is listed grade II*, was constructed in around 1222. It is a much loved presence in, and the focal point of, our village. It was totally restored in

2003 and had a new sound system installed to equip it for the 21st Century. Positioned in the centre of the village, it occupies immaculate grounds which are maintained to the same high standard as the building itself. The interior of the building is cleaned on a weekly basis and fresh flowers provided, usually by a team of Village ladies but currently by a teenager undertaking his Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award.

The quinquennial and electrical inspections of the premises are due this year and the PCC will undertake to deal with any issues resulting from these as soon as possible. During the last 12 months we have had the church clock inspected as part of its regular maintenance programme and have had a roof alarm installed.

The church organ is due to be refurbished and a campaign has been undertaken to raise funds to enable us to carry out this work. To date with the aid of grants, donations and dedicated events over half the required amount needed has been reached.

A Benefice Choir has recently been re-established. The first performances took place at the Nine Lessons and Carols Services at St Leonard's and All Saints Mears Ashby. It is planned that the Choir will sing at all Benefice Services and at major Feast Days. Choir practice takes place on a fortnightly basis on Monday evenings at All Saints.

The Village Hall (the building to the right of the picture)

The Village Hall is owned by the church and was last decorated in 2002/3. This was made possible by a generous donation of a well-wisher. There are a number of urgent problems regarding the condition of the building which the PCC are endeavouring to address, including the replacement of the entire floor and heating system. The PCC will be applying for grants and undertaking fund raising events to enable us to carry out this work.



The Hall has one regular letting to a Wood Turning Club. We struggle to achieve any other occupancy because of the limited facilities, space and lack of car parking.

Below are some answers to questions you may wish to ask although it is not an exhaustive list by any means.

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|------------------------|--|
| Vestments | Seasonal stoles are worn with cassock/surplice at Holy Communion, and choir wear at other services. |
| Lay Involvement | Lay people carry out the readings and on occasions lead the prayers. Sometimes a trained person leads Evensong/Matins. |
| Stewardship | At present we have no stewardship scheme in place. This is an area we would like to address as a matter of urgency. |

- Parish Share** The Parish Share for 2016 was set for the Benefice at £49,393, with the Hardwick contribution being agreed at £12,151. With the help of our fund raising activities we were able to pay £11,000 with £1,151 of this outstanding. In previous years we have endeavoured to pay our share in full but with such a small congregation this has become increasingly difficult.
- Financial Standing** The PCC is currently financially sound thanks to a legacy which was bequeathed to us in 2002. This has diminished as we have required funds to maintain the church building and village hall.
- Charitable Giving** For a number of years the PCC has made donations and gifts to a number of charitable institutions.
- Church Building** This was fully restored in 2003 and pending the outcome of the quinquennial this year is considered to be in good repair. The churchyard is still open and maintained by the PCC with the help of the village residents to a very high standard.
- Other Buildings** The church owns the village hall which is situated next to the churchyard adjoining the Old School House. The hall meets the requirements of the Disability Act and provides the church with a function room, kitchen, and lavatories.
- Outreach & Mission** St Leonard's has run a bible study group for a number of years which meets at Hardwick House twice a month. This is currently attended by members of St Leonard's and All Saints Mears Ashby. We would like to encourage more people to join this from the village and our weekly services in church.

Facts & Figures

Parish Population Approximately 81. The youngest resident is 6 years old and the oldest is 89,

Number on PCC 7

Church Electoral Roll Residents 15, Non residents 5 Total 20

Church Services		Average attendance	
Day & Time	Service	2015	2016
1st Sunday 9:00 a.m	Holy Communion	8	11
2nd Sunday	Matins	9	10
4th Sunday	BCP Evensong	8	7
Easter		23	19
Harvest		20 +8	13
Nine Lessons & Carols		80 +7	55+5
Christmas Day 8:00 a.m	Holy Communion	29	27

occasional offices		
	2015	2016
Baptism	0	0
Wedding	2	0
Funeral	1	2

Audited Accounts for the year ended December 2016 will be available for inspection upon request.

2016					20 16	
	General Fund	Fund raising and other income	Total 2016	Total 2015	Gillian Down	Church Hall
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Receipts, Donations, Legacies, etc	6,461	13,011	19,472	18,425	39,412	441
Resources Expended	17,949		17,949	15,923	0	682
Bank Current			7,491	7,459		
Savings Accounts			39,412	38,162		

Future Objectives

We would like to ensure that our church continues to be the spiritual heart of the village, that it is used on a regular basis, and certainly no less frequently than at present, for worship and for private prayer.

We would like to make the Church accessible to everyone who wants to hear God's word and we would like to see that small community grow and continue to make a significant contribution to the life of the village and Benefice as a whole. This could be achieved by the Rector working with us by meeting with members of our village on all levels of their journey with God and, without being judgemental, assist them on their road and encourage their faith to grow and plant the seeds where none currently exist. We would welcome the help of the Rector to be able to assist in this task.

We want to continue to maintain our Church in excellent order so that future generations can enjoy our inheritance and so that it continues to be an asset to our village.

Our Challenges for the Future

We have an ageing congregation and few are coming back to church to replace them.

This ageing congregation also has its own needs in that a contemporary service is alien to them as it goes against everything they were brought up with. We do not wish to dismiss a modern approach but this generation forms the backbone of our church and central churchmanship would, we believe, take their needs into account.

The lack of family involvement needs to be addressed so that this church can begin to grow. With a village of this size and nature however this will continue to be a significant problem.

By encouraging people to become members and to be part of the Church we believe that the problem of our diminishing income will be solved. Allied to this is the need to make a Benefice Stewardship Campaign the highest priority for the incoming incumbent.

We need a more coherent structure within the Benefice as a whole to enable it to work more closely together and to encourage greater travel between the churches. With this in mind a small Benefice council could be advantageous comprising the church wardens, treasurers, secretaries, and Deanery Synod members, to oversee planning throughout the Benefice.

We would like to encourage more members of the congregation and interested villagers to join our active Bible study group.

Bridges need to be built for those who have become disillusioned and have left and those who are distant from God's Church. As a church we need to be bold enough to offer help as best we can and also have the courage to make the first move.

Things we do well

- We are a welcoming church.
- We are homely and social.
- We are willing to be flexible and are prepared to adopt changes bearing the above in mind.
- We enjoy holding social events to bring our community together and to raise funds to continue the life of the church.
- We take immense pride in our buildings and their surroundings.
- We endeavour to look after those in our village who need our love and prayers or practical help, when they, or a loved one is ill, or simply when they need someone to share with.

Mears Ashby

Mears Ashby is a rural village within five miles of Wellingborough and 8 miles of Northampton with a population (2011 census figures) of 473 and approximately 230 households. Most properties are owner-occupied, 14 are local authority housing and approximately 10 are privately rented.

The population is a mix of young families, couples with no children, middle-aged, retired and elderly, unemployed, manual, executive and professional with the emphasis on middle-aged executive and professional. The majority of working residents commute although several small businesses operate within the village, eg, builders, accountants, garden nurseries. There are three working farms (two arable and one beef/sheep), and one or two smallholdings.



We have one public house, the Griffin's Head (above left), and the Village Hall (above right) - a church-owned building run by Trustees which is used on a regular basis and is a considerable asset to the village.

Mears Ashby CEVA primary school is situated at the top of North Street and although there are a number of children from the village attending, the majority come in from Wellingborough. The children attend Church for their own services and the present Incumbent is a Governor. www.mearsashby.northants.sch.uk/home

All Saints Church

A 12th Century Grade II* listed building is in an excellent state of repair, with a Doom painting that was conserved in the 1980s, a peal of six bells and a well-maintained organ. It seats about 200 people. The next Quinquennial is due in 2019. There are some 20 grave spaces left in this well-kept churchyard which is maintained by a well-organised group of mowers. We have a dedicated group of cleaners and flower arrangers. Our Clock winder is also the Tower captain who arranges bell-ringers for weddings and special services. E-bound roof alarm is installed.

Finance

We have managed to pay our parish share in full each year by monthly Direct Debit. We operate a Stewardship scheme although there has not been a renewal for some years. A copy of the audited accounts for 2016 is available on request and below is a summary of those accounts. (The income in 2016 was boosted by an £18,000 bequest).

	General Fund	Fabric Fund	current a/c	Deposit a/c	CBF investment fund
Opening balance	16048.62	5175.09	3688.76	28699.44	54464.00
Income	31854.48	2812.64			
Expenditure	18820.24	3347.47			

Congregational Life and worship

Worship at All Saints is traditional and the preferred mode of dress for the Incumbent at Communion will be cassock, surplice and stole with choir wear at other services. Members of the congregation take part in reading the Lessons and leading intercessions.

Electoral Roll - 26 (4 non-residents)

Parochial Church Council at the time of writing consists of our one Churchwarden and two PCC members. We have lost members through death and/or moving out of the Benefice and because of personality clashes with the previous incumbent it has proved increasingly difficult to attract anyone to serve on the PCC in Mears Ashby in recent years. However, we look forward with great hope that a new Incumbent will renew faith and enthusiasm.

Services

- 6pm BCP Evensong with a choir and average congregation of 13 people, was discontinued in October 2012 and replaced with a "Well" service which proved unsuccessful and was discontinued in September 2014.
- Cafe Church began in the Village Hall in 2012 and ran successfully for twelve months under lay leadership but when the leader moved from the Benefice, attendance gradually dropped and this was discontinued in October 2015.
- 8am BCP Communion attracted between 3 and 11 communicants but was discontinued in 2010 following a change in the Benefice service pattern.
- We now have Communion services at 9 am on the second and third Sunday of each month - total attendance at these in 2016 was 85 adults (ASA 1.6)
- Benefice Communion service at 10am on every fifth Sunday - total attendance in 2016 was 157 adults and 26 children. (ASA 3.1)
- Two additional services were held during 2016:
 - Queen's birthday service the congregation was 40 adults and 6 children
 - Remembrance Sunday 60 adults and 25 children.

Our congregation has reduced as a result of the changes in services and times and also the loss of regular worshipping members through death, moving out of the Benefice or general dis-satisfaction.

Occasional offices 2015 - 2016

Funerals - 4
Baptisms - 2
Weddings - 3

The future

We look forward to maintaining our strong links within the Benefice and for the PCCs continuing to work closely with each other.

We are desperate for the new Incumbent to bring the Church back to life in this parish and embrace all parishioners; to encourage and strengthen all who have worked in the past and are working hard now but have become despondent and disheartened.

Ss Peter and Paul, Sywell with St. Nicholas, Overstone

St Nicholas, Overstone became a joint Benefice with St Peter and St Paul, Sywell in 1923 and in March 1992 the two churches joined Mears Ashby and Hardwick to become a United Benefice. In 2007 St Peter and St Paul and St Nicholas became one parish and St Nicholas was designated a Chapel of Ease.



The two villages are joined together by one linear road with several roads and small estates leading off.

St Peter and St Paul is situated in the Old Village of Sywell, much of which was constructed by Lady Wantage in the 1860s, although parts of the church itself are much older.

St Nicholas, Overstone is situated on the edge of open parkland which contains the derelict Overstone Hall, previously the headquarters of the New Testament Church of God which was devastated by fire some years ago. The Church is about ¼ mile off the main road and as such is away from the main housing. The villages although still retaining their own identity have many social organisations and functions together and still retain their rural outlook although many of the residents are commuters to local towns – Kettering, Northampton, Wellingborough, Milton Keynes and London, working in professions and skilled occupations. There are several working farms both livestock and arable in the two villages.

St Nicholas' Church, Overstone is in the Deanery of Wellingborough with the first church built in 1222, close to the Manor House but as it impeded the views across the park, together with it being situated close to the 'lost village of Overstone', it was demolished in 1771 and rebuilt on the present site. It was dedicated to St Nicholas in July 1807 and restored and enlarged in 1903, when bells were first hung. Built of Kingsthorpe stone, with mosaic floors, the church features oak and pitch pine ceiling and furnishings. Recent re-ordering of the church has removed the traditional pews leaving flexibility for worship, drama and other activities including the luncheon club and youth club. The church is small to medium sized with a chancel, nave and north aisle, a vicar's and organ vestry, a baptistery and a western tower. A kitchen/meeting room and toilet was added in 2001.

Recent restoration has included updating the boiler and in January 2017 the fitting of a new oil tank and piping to the boiler.

Overstone Village, approximately 5 miles from Northampton has a population of approximately 750 (2011 census), which is evenly dispersed across the parish and is made up of a diverse range of groups – mainly families and pensioners. The majority of housing is owner occupied with a few council or privately rented.

Local employment is minimal – once an agricultural community, the village is now a commuter belt for the local towns. There are however several local employers.

Overstone Leisure Centre situated in the local Overstone Park has golf, swimming pool and other leisure facilities together with a small housing community;

Popperfotos is situated on the edge of the village in farm buildings and houses one of the largest collections of news photographs from around the world and **Sywell Airport** provides a substantial amount of local employment.

The village has a local shop with a post office.



Overstone Primary School is situated on the main road and is currently scheduled to double in size (100 to 200 ie one form entry) to accommodate the expanding development of Overstone Leys. Currently the school has local village children and



others from the neighbouring areas on its register.

The current minister visits the school weekly taking an assembly and the headteacher is keen to foster and develop a strong and active relationship with the church and whilst not a church school, the staff and pupils do visit St Nicholas several times a year (Harvest, Carol Service, Easter/Christmas Experiences). These and other visits are well

supported by the children's parents.

Building has just begun (October 2016) on the development of **Overstone Leys**. Initially a bypass around the village of Moulton is being constructed with housing development for 2000 homes consisting of 2/3/4/5 bedroom houses in the surrounding countryside. The housing development is expected to take twenty years with the bye-pass completed in autumn 2017. A new all -through 4-18 years School is also planned. The local secondary school is situated in Moulton village together with an agricultural college.

Although situated on the edge of the village of Overstone the new development will give an incoming incumbent the opportunity for 'outreach, and spiritually guidance'. A drive around the area will emphasise the opportunities available.

Overstone has a village hall (situated opposite the shop/post office) and is well used and supported by the local communities of both Overstone and Sywell. As well as having 'mums and tots group', breakfast mornings, and celebratory parties (eg New Year's Eve Village party) there is also an indoor bowls club attended by many from Sywell village. The village hall was donated to the village by a former resident and churchgoer. It was later bought by a village resident and church

member and donated to the village. Other organisations using the hall include the gardening club, Parish Council and Playing Fields Association. Situated between the two villages is **Overstone Park Cricket Club**. A very successful and thriving club with several teams playing in the local leagues and having several ex-professional players as coaches.

St Peter and St Paul's Church, Sywell is in the Deanery of Wellingborough and is situated in the old village alongside the village green. The present church was built of Northamptonshire stone between the 12th and 14th centuries and was restored, including the rebuilding of the chancel in the 1860s. There is evidence of an earlier church building here as the 13th century tower with its stair projection rests on original Norman foundations, tower arch and arcade. The 12th century south door is original but all that remains of the 14th century north transept is the recessed tomb. An unusual feature of the church is its two fonts! The old 13th century font was discovered in a local field and brought back into the church again, although it is no longer used for baptisms.

During the 1860s Lord and Lady Wantage of Overstone restored the church and also developed the surrounding housing to provide a 'model' village for their estate workers. The Wantage's improvements included the building of a church elementary school on the green and next to the churchyard and the original Horseshoe Public House. Further village expansion during the 20th century saw a new church primary school (1966), now along the main road. The old school is now the village hall, the Horseshoe Pub moving to a new site on the main road and additional housing providing for population growth of around 800 (2011 census), still with a strong bond and focus upon the old village and the church as a centre of community life.

Various memorials in the church give evidence to the lives of some of the Sywell inhabitants – the Wilmers, Watkins and Pells, but the most beautiful and imposing feature is the painted memorial north window designed by Christopher Whall, a famous artist of the 'art and craft movement'. Whall's windows are fairly rare and Sywell is honoured and fortunate to have this window.



The church has undergone a variety of restoration projects. A restoration fund of the late 20th century and early 21st provided funds (£35,000) for restoration of the lower tower and rainwater provision in 2002. A few years later the east window showing cracks required refurbishment. £30,000 was raised through grants allowing the window to be removed, refurbished and returned insitu. More recently quinquennial work has been undertaken: extensive re-pointing around the south chancel door and windows, making the church draught and water proof. A new gas boiler was fitted five years ago.

Sadly in August 2016 thieves removed the entire lead from the roof. In order to protect this beautiful Grade II* listed building a temporary/permanent roof cover has been added in the form of two layers of roofing felt. This cover will not last for ever and the PCC has to raise £55,000 in order to replace the felt with lead and a roof alarm. The church organ was also damaged and requires restoration. The internal

damage was considerable and the church has been totally redecorated. Current insurance was just adequate to cover the temporary felt roof and redecoration. The church reopened for services on Sunday 5th February 2017.

Sywell village, (the name is thought to mean 7 wells) is approximately 7 miles from Northampton town centre in a semi-rural location. We have a thriving village community with a Christian primary school, public house at the heart of the village, hotel and restaurant and a shop selling a wide variety of goods. There is a country park which is a great walk and a haven for bird watchers, dog walkers and fisherman.



There is a small commercial airfield which has a concrete runway and usually puts on 2 or 3 big events in the year which tend to bring several thousand people into the village. The airfield is of historical interest with a flying school, museum a hotel and a small industrial estate. The Blades, a flying display team with many pilots being ex-red arrows is based at the airport. There is also a small industrial and warehouse estate. There is a Park (Overstone Solarium) with shop and restaurant which mainly comprises mobile homes where the residents are permitted to live there for 10 months of the year. There is also a small population of permanent residents one of whom is a parish visitor.

The majority of Sywell housing is owner occupied with a few council or privately rented. The population was approximately 800 (2011 census) and covers all age ranges and a wide variety of professions.

The Old School now used as the **Village Hall** is situated on the village green and is surrounded by cottages built in the 1860s by Lord and Lady Wantage for their estate workers.



There are a number of groups and associations which tend to draw from both Sywell and Overstone villages such as daytime WI and evening WI, Gardening Club, bowls club, Brownies, Sywell Strollers and keep fit to name just a few. Sywell Playgroup meets in buildings at the airport.

A joint **village newsletter** with Overstone is published monthly keeping all residents well informed of amenities and activities.

The **Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School** is situated opposite a shop (Past & Presents) along the main road. The staff and foundation governors are committed to the children's Christian Education both in scripture and social awareness. A sub-committee of the governing body – the Ethos Committee monitors provision and development of the school values and Christian ethos. All Foundation Governors are active Christians, several within the Sywell and Overstone Parish churches. There is a 'praying parents' group



meeting on Wednesday morning in school. A new innovation has been the introduction of TGI Fridays (Messy Church style) where children are given the opportunity for crafts, food and prayers for an hour after school on Fridays. This Christian themed opportunity is now been led by a parent governor. We used to have an Evangelist working within the Benefice and Sywell School, and until recently the local minister led worship once a week. The children have a close relationship with Sywell church. These links between the church and school are very strong and the children play a significant part in the Harvest Festival, Mothering Sunday, Christingle and the school hold their leavers service in the church. The children also lead a 'Values Worship' six times a year in church and Messy Church has been held in the school on several occasions.

The Parish Ministry has many facets – church services, study/prayer groups, visiting/sick communion, outreach, youth work, Cool Christian Kids and social events.

Beckworth's Carol Service: One of the most successful outreach opportunities has been the carol service during December at the Garden Centre at Beckworths, a mile past Sywell Airport. Children from both Sywell and Mears Ashby schools have been involved, where attendance has usually been around the 400 mark.

Families are very welcome to all our services and during the first three Sundays of each month prior to the scripture readings and sermon the children are taken out for fun activities with a Christian theme, by our children's workers. This group call themselves 'Cool Christian Kids'! The children return in time for the communion where they receive the bread or a blessing. The two communion services are traditional in style with prayers readings and sermon. The fourth Sunday is an All Age Worship and includes participation by all age groups. Members of the congregation often lead prayers and the bible readings. The Peace is shared by all and each service is completed by the entire congregation joining hands in a circle to say the Grace together. All services are relaxing and have an evangelical theme with modern songs (eg Stuart Townend) using current technology with extensive use of power point. The organ is used, often for the retiring traditional hymn.

Occasional Services, as already mentioned include services with both schools ie Harvest, Christingle, Crib Service, Mothering Sunday.



For many years one of the year's highlights has been the '**Walk of Witness**' beginning at St Nicholas, Overstone and finishing at St Leonard's, Hardwick. Starting around 10.00am on **Good Friday** and carrying a wooden cross, the walk stops for prayers at St Peter and St Paul, Sywell, then All Saints, Mears Ashby and finally arriving at St Leonard's,

Hardwick for a soup and roll. The walk of around five miles (road/field), is completed with an hour of contemplative meditation in the church. Some walk all/part of the way, the non-walkers arriving by car for the snack and church service. This has proved to be very popular not only with the adults but also the children and is being continued during the interregnum.

Study/prayer groups: There are several of these around the parish and benefice.

Christianity Explored: There have been several study groups over the years.

Sick communion and home/hospital visits: Sick communion and home/hospital visits are undertaken by **three pastoral visitors** and the minister who monitor the needs of the parish and also Overstone Solarium. Two lay visitors are contemplating taking a two year course which would result in licensing by the Bishop as '**Lay Pastoral Ministers**'.

Service Statistics (20160

	Congregation	Communicants	Children
Morning Worship (1 st Sunday)	19	13	6
Holy Communion (2 nd Sunday)	22	16	6
Holy Communion (3 rd Sunday)	20	13	7
All Age Worship (4 th Sunday)	19	13	6
Wednesday Morning	3	3	nil
Baptisms	2		
Weddings	4		
Funerals	3		
Number on Electoral Roll	35		
Number on PCC	6		

Easter and Christmas Experiences: Easter 2016 and Christmas 2016 saw the introduction of these 'experiences'. The children's workers arranged a series of tableaux in Overstone Church which depicted the two festive celebrations. These interactive tableaux covered all areas of the church and both Sywell and Overstone schools brought groups of children for these experiences, which were also enjoyed by church members and those coming to the Crib Service.



Cool Christian Kids (CCK)

CCK was established to meet a need for a growing number of families attending church with younger children. Meeting for the first three Sundays every month, the children (school age) are led by a dedicated team who introduce them to the Bible

through craft, games, prayer and scripture. Average attendance was 8-10 children although latterly, with 2 families moving away, numbers have dropped. This has given us the opportunity to review the work we do and we have taken the opportunity to start working through the Click series, currently looking through the eyes of Doctor Luke.

For the past few years, the children have also chosen a charity to support raising money for Water Aid, and encouraging the congregation to fill shoe boxes with items for Operation Christmas Child.

The children and their leaders have worked together to establish Messy Church averaging about 3-4 messy events / year. In 2016, we also put on The Easter and Christmas experience, transforming Overstone church so that local schools and other visitors could walk back in time.

The future for the children's work is bright. As leaders, we believe in bringing the Bible to life for children of all ages but also wish to provide the children with the opportunity to become an integral part of the church family through active participation in worship.

Church Youth Club (O&SIS)

The Church Youth Club was started at the beginning of 2015 but disbanded in December 2016 when the leaders left the Benefice and was held on Sunday evenings from 6.30 until 8pm at Overstone Church. It was named OASIS by those attending. Its full capacity, due to the number of adults present, was 25 and on several occasions, we did reach this amount. There was a mix of boys and girls that attended. These came from, Overstone, Sywell, surrounding villages and Northampton.

There were numerous activities over the hour and a half which included team games, craft and many other fun activities which everyone seemed to enjoy. The youth club were in possession of several amusement games such as air hockey, a mini pool table, table football and a table tennis set, which were mainly used in the colder months. In the milder weather, activities were held outside as well as inside. There was no compulsory requirement for anyone to partake in these and if they wanted they could use the time to meet friends and chat. Giant bean bags were provided to sit on. There was also access to a games machine and DVD player (projector). At every meeting, there was food available, which consisted of such delights as jacket potatoes with beans, pizza, chicken nuggets and chips etc. Again, this was not compulsory.

Oasis also organised a meal out for the youths, which was thoroughly enjoyed and well attended. There was also a tuck shop for those who wanted to treat themselves or their friends. This was always well used.

The cost for attending Oasis was £1, with another £1 if food was required, which most seemed to join in with.

It is hoped that this year Oasis will be up and running again.

Finances

With the Diocese of Peterborough increasing the Parish Share considerably each year we have been unable to pay our share in full for the last six years. Both churches and in particular St Peter and St Paul Sywell have provided considerable funding for extensive refurbishments to the church building. We encourage giving by Christian Stewardship and Gift Aid. Our total Gift Aid giving last year (Jan-Dec 2016) was £17,735 giving us Gift Aid to claim slightly in excess of £4,000.

The 2016 accounts are currently being audited, but accounts are presented at each PCC meeting and these are available if required.

2016 Total Receipts:	£43,915
2016 Total payments	£34,875
Excess receipts over payments	£9,040

Receipts are not normally this high but additional income has come in through the insurance claim on the roof but that has also gone out through expenses.

There are also four other accounts:

Fabric Fund (old 100Club)	£2,500
CCLA Sywell	£1,028
CCLA Overstone	£2,962
CCLA unknown	£548

Strengths

- We are a strong and committed group of people who are welcoming, open to change and growth and to encourage each other's' individual gifts and talents.
- We have a strong but small and willing CCK. Several families have moved house recently reducing our children's numbers.
- We are very family/child friendly, without alienating others and need this to continue for the parish to grow.
- We need to maintain excellent links with both schools.
- We have a wide range of worship styles, both traditional and modern.
- We enjoy Bible-based teaching both in church and fellowship groups.
- We work together, supporting each other and the local community.

Weaknesses

- Communication within the Benefice needs to improve and the Benefice of 3 parishes (4 churches) needs to work more closely together.
- Are we serving the community in ways that they need and can respond?
- More work needs to be done to encourage 'one off' visitors to return to church. For instance after a baptism service we need to encourage parents and friends to return.
- The church building needs to be more available during the week for private prayer.
- Low level of stewardship.
- Lack of men's fellowship

Our Vision for the Future

- Continued growth in numbers and discipleship.
- Improve our outreach. Opportunities will arise with the new Overstone Leys development.
- Possible simplification of the Benefice structure.
- Further development of our ministry teams.
- Continued family growth and youth and children's work.