

## INTRODUCTION

The United Benefice of Braishfield has been in existence, in its current form, for over 20 years it is rural, but not remote. [This map](#) shows each church's location in the Benefice. Each church and community has its own identity and they work well together as a cohesive and collaborative group. We are united as a benefice in our love for God and our love for his people, and express this in our own communities.

We have three ancient church buildings and two that were built in the mid-1800s. There is also a small 12<sup>th</sup> century church in the hamlet of Eldon, which is maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust, and where we hold an annual service in summer.

We have two good primary schools in our Benefice. Both Romsey secondary schools are excellent, as are the Sixth-Form colleges in Eastleigh, Winchester and Brockenhurst providing education for years 12 & 13 and are all well served by public transport.

Located in the beautiful [Test Valley](#), the area is very well connected: London is only an hour away by train from Winchester; there are direct trains to Manchester and the North; to the west, one can be in east Devon in two hours. The Benefice is near to the New Forest and the beaches of Bournemouth are less than an hour away. Southampton, Winchester and Salisbury are all close by, offering universities, theatres, festivals and shopping. Trains from Romsey run to Wales, the West Midlands, and to Portsmouth via Southampton.

Southampton Airport is approximately 12 miles away and offers good connectivity to UK regional airports and European hubs.



## OUR VISION

In response to God's love, our aim is to serve and help transform our communities for good, and to help people of all ages to come to faith and to grow and share the good news of Jesus Christ.

The five churches in our Benefice are St Mary's Michelmersh, All Saints' Braishfield, St John's Farley Chamberlayne, St Andrew's Timsbury and All Saint's Awbridge.

### Worship:

- demonstrating the Good News of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit
- using creative ways of worship
- providing more opportunities for prayer and bible study
- growing our leadership team and involving more lay people in leading worship
- encouraging regular, planned, and generous giving

### Evangelism, Mission and Outreach:

- developing deeper relationships between people of all ages within our communities
- growing our work with children and families
- building on our good relationships with the schools in the Benefice
- engaging with social issues such as food poverty, the environment and work with appropriate charities
- raising awareness of, and fundraising for, Christian charities in the UK and overseas

### Pastoral and Social Care:

- deepening our pastoral care to be more effective in our communities

We are excited about the arrival of an Associate Priest to the team to help us move forward with our vision.



## OUR CHURCH LIFE

A breadth of worship is important to us and our Sunday worship ranges from traditional to contemporary, and from formal to less formal. A typical schedule can be accessed [here](#). As a United Benefice we regularly share in worship together. Lay led services are held across the Benefice, and members participate through reading and leading intercessions. Thy Kingdom Come and Messy Church provide valuable opportunities to engage with our local communities. Music in worship is led by an organist/keyboard player in all our churches and a small four-part choir at Braishfield. Services are normally followed by refreshments.

Our congregations are primarily made up of regular worshippers, and we are pleased to welcome the many from our communities who come for special occasions, when our churches are often full to overflowing. We want to be at the heart of the community in our villages and there are many people outside our regular congregations who help with maintenance of the churches and grounds. There is also a United Reformed Church, in Braishfield, with which All Saints' has close links, including organising joint World Day of Prayer, Remembrance and Christian Aid Week services.

Prayer, discipleship, bible study and home groups are held across the Benefice; some are shared between the parishes. All five churches are used for meetings and social events. Courses for Advent, and Lent sometimes take place in the café of a local garden centre. The unique Norman church of St John's is the only public space in Farley Chamberlayne, so it is the focal point for the community. The eight-day Farley walk has, for the last 20 years, raised substantial financial

support for the church and also creates a sense of fellowship and pilgrimage among the 40 or so involved. We extend a warm, friendly welcome to everyone in our communities, offering hospitality which has become key to our mission and outreach. Social events we organise for our village communities include:

- Coffee mornings
- Harvest suppers
- Cream teas
- Barbecues



- Village lunches
- Curry nights
- Community singing groups
- Walks
- Music concerts
- Steam train rides with picnics (Awbridge)
- Marmalade festival (Michelmersh)
- St Andrew's fish supper (Timsbury)
- Children's Christmas tree festival (Braishfield)

Many church members are very actively involved in village community life.

Church members are engaged in issues of social justice and in caring for communities at home and abroad and support projects such as Food Banks, Fair Trade and other relevant charities.

Every church would love to see more children and families; we wish to make services more appealing to children and young people. Current plans to improve facilities in our churches will enhance provision for families. Our two primary schools are welcomed at their respective churches for festival services. Braishfield organises a weekly after-school club, "Sparks". "Open the Book" assemblies have started at both schools, in addition to regular clergy-led assemblies. "Prayer Spaces in Schools" is in its third year. Messy Church is held bi-monthly. Awbridge organises a vibrant weekly toddler group.

## OUR TEAM



Revd Tom Benson: Rector of Braishfield Benefice and Priest in Charge of Somborne with Ashley: *“I arrived in the benefice in July 2021, having previously been the Rector of a benefice in South Devon since 2012. It was fortunate that the start of my ministry here coincided with covid restrictions being lifted so it was very much a time of fresh starts for all of us. For me, this group of parishes represents rural ministry at its best.”*



Revd Jane Thompson: Associate Priest: *“I moved to the Benefice during ordination training and following ordination in 2016 was delighted to remain as curate. I was licensed in January 2020 both to the Benefice as Associate Priest and to the Deanery as Youth, Schools and Children’s Officer, reflecting my passion for young people and children. I currently work full-time, SSM.”*

*We are expecting a full time stipendiary curate to join us after his ordination in June 2026 who will be licensed across the Braishfield Benefice and King’s Somborne with Ashley*

## OUR ORGANISATION

Each church in the Benefice has its own PCC. The 9 Churchwardens, plus the churchwardens of King's Somborne also meet regularly with the Rector. A spirit of unity, respect and understanding ensures that this system works well: the individual PCCs focus on their specific matters - ranging from their engagement with their wider parish community to maintaining the fabric of historic ancient buildings, whilst the Churchwardens focus on the more strategic and cross Benefice issues.

The parish of Somborne with Ashley is grouped with our Benefice. The Rector is Priest-in-Charge of the parish of Somborne with Ashley. This is a permissive, not prescriptive, relationship. Together we are developing a good and mutually supportive partnership. Together we are developing a good and mutually supportive partnership which is predicted to deepen in the future, with the most likely outcome being a new untied benefice of six parishes.

All our church buildings and grounds are well maintained and are up to date with quinquennial inspection recommendations. Braishfield has responsibility for its Church Room which, as well as being used for church meetings and events, is let for activities and social functions; it is financially self-supporting.

We are delighted that our finances are sound. All the PCCs meet the challenge of paying their Common Mission Fund contributions in full and are able to fund local mission initiatives. There is a United Benefice Fund, financed by the PCCs, to pay all Benefice expenses, including those of the Rector.

The Benefice office produces a weekly Notice Sheet and "Five Alive", our monthly Benefice magazine. We communicate via social media, village newsletters, e-mail networks, and have a presence on our village websites and on "A Church Near You".

