

# Churn Valley Benefice

2020 APCMs for Coberley and Cowley, Colesbourne, Elkstone

Clergy Report by Arthur Champion (Revd)

April 2019 - March 2020

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### 1. Worship

Worship is at the heart of the Christian faith. God's love draws us to worship each Sunday, to seek His forgiveness and try to understand His will for our lives. Sunday congregations usually comprise eight to twelve adults and sadly no children.

Baptisms, weddings and funerals always attract much larger congregations. Its always encouraging to see the churches full for Easter, Harvest, Remembrance and Christmas celebrations. The liturgy on Sunday mornings has increasingly celebrated the agricultural year with special services for Plough Sunday, Rogation, Lammastide and Harvest. Sermons have sometimes been enhanced in all four churches by use of digital projection.

In the past year there were seven baptisms as well as the first ever naming and blessing service (1<sup>st</sup> December at Elkstone). Its now 25 years since a confirmation service! There were only five weddings although an informal blessing service was also conducted in a farm at Upper Coberley. We have conducted about a dozen funerals between us; mostly in the Northern parishes. The funeral for Nora Sly was held on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2020. She had lived in Cowley for over 90 years until her health deteriorated when she moved to live at Upper Rissington in the home of Caroline and Andrew Maclean.



Nora's 95<sup>th</sup> birthday party on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018 at Upper Rissington

A film crew from the BBC "Songs of Praise" made a surprise visit to Colesbourne. The programme was broadcast on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020 and featured an interview with Lady Carolyn who spoke about the significance of snowdrops at Candlemass. The singing came from a Black Pentecostal church in Reading!



**The Revd Kate Botley with Lady Carolyn**



**Margaret, Ronnie, Carole, Sylvie and Malcolm**

Elkstone's annual Christingle service was again led by Jennie Howlett with the collection being donated to the Children's Society. Geoff Gait-Carr led the Toy Service with the collection being donated to Stroud Women's Refuge. Some of the Elkstone congregation marked Palm Sunday 2019 by "prayer walking" through the village on the way to worship in the church building.

2019 was the year when the news media promoted awareness of climate change because of protests by Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion. Once again the Diocese of Gloucester celebrated "Creationtide" throughout September culminating on St Francis Day (4<sup>th</sup> October) and leading into several Harvest Festivals. The CVB clergy and readers adopted a parallel set of Bible readings to those of the Lectionary, which encouraged caring for creation.

For the past 12 years Cliff has been leading worship on three Sundays each month but with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 he's decided to do two Sunday (second and third of each month). The clergy team are thinly spread across all nine parishes.

Worship was disrupted during February because of storms on three consecutive weekends followed by precautions against the spread of Covid-19 coronavirus. The Bishop of Tewkesbury is planning to join us between Palm Sunday and Easter Day.

## **2. Bible study and prayer meetings**

A mid-week Bible study group has been meeting all year; usually on the first Wednesday evening each month at Cowley rectory. Most of the committed participants are from Elkstone and we are sometimes joined by others from Cowley, Coberley and Bagendon. We met nearly every week during Lent 2019 culminating in an Agape service during Holy Week. The group is currently

studying "The Pilgrim Way: a guide to the Christian life". For several decades the Elkstone congregation met for mid-week prayers in the church building but during 2019 the prayer meeting shifted to once a month and is being hosted by Sylvie at Manor Cross.

### 3. Pastoral care

The clergy have tried to make phone calls and/or pastoral visits whenever notified of any parishioners who are ill at home or in hospital and we urgently need to find volunteers who can be trained up to befriend baptism families and those who are bereaved. Practical and spiritual support was given to someone who was suddenly evicted from her long-term tenancy when the surrounding land was sold off.

### 4. Mission

The Anglican Communion's "Five marks of mission" have inspired quite a lot of activity:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom - The PCCs at Elkstone, Coberley and Cowley have continued supporting Faith and Ben Newton who have chosen to live in a deprived area of Gloucester where they can share God's love with the local Muslim community. Faith is the daughter of our organist Ian (and Hilary) James. This is believed to be the PCCs' first ever long-term mission partnership. In August nine local men visiting to the Cotswold Lion Brewery at Coberley. Andy the marketing manager and Steven the brewmaster showed us around, described the process which is a mix of art and science, answered our questions and kindly allowed us to sample three different types of beer before leaving. We are hoping to do more of these kinds of visits in 2020.



**Visit to the Cotswold Lion Brewery in Coberley**

- To teach, baptise and nurture new believers - Whilst there is a steady flow of baptisms at Cowley and Elkstone these are nearly all past wedding couples. On Thursday mornings a team comprising Cliff, Sylvie, Duncan and Penny normally present "Open the Book" at Coberley CofE school. Arthur has led some "Guide's Own" services at Deerpark.

- To respond to human need by loving service - We are active supporters of Cheltenham Open Door (charity of the homeless), Clerk's Patch at Coberley, the Arthur Connolly Trust at Coberley, the National Star College again at Coberley and the Sue Ryder Hospice. Cliff and Duncan McGaw are active governors at Coberley CofE primary school.
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation - Several individuals give up their time to serve at the local magistrate's court, Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS) and elsewhere. Arthur has a long-standing commitment to supporting an urban development project in Addis Ababa as well as the project leader's troubled family. Cliff has continued to serve each February as chaplain at Talbot House in Poperinge, Belgium.
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the Earth - We have continued to support the Diocese of Gloucester's aspiration of becoming an Eco Diocese by Christmas 2020. Seven of the nine CVB parish churches have registered with A Rocha. Elkstone and Stratton have received bronze EcoChurch Awards. Elkstone has been helping other parish churches that are looking for advice on composting toilets and wild flower meadows. Arthur continues to organise regular meetings of the Gloucestershire Environmental Justice Network which is sponsored by Churches Together in Gloucestershire.

## 5. Clergy team

David, Arthur and Cliff usually meet on Monday morning at 9.30am in Cowley or Stratton to say the daily office and coordinate activities. We usually meet once a month with Bob Edy and Jan Moore and readers including Ruth Edy, Martin Green, Mark Venn and more recently Christopher Hall. We are discussing some fundamental issues arising from the book "Transforming Communities". In September we participated in a clergy conference at Swanwick in Derbyshire which happens every three years. We are also required to attend the Bishop's training days held every six months at a nearby hotel

## 6. PCC Officers

The clergy team is grateful for the serious commitment of all the PCC members especially those who serve as churchwarden, chairman, secretary and treasurer.

Elkstone - Geoff Gait-Carr has continued serving as church warden, organist and he sometimes leads worship. Brian Howlett has continued as Treasurer which has required considerable extra work for the bells appeal (see section 10). Brian has recently introduced cashless giving at Elkstone using text messages. After over 15 years as PCC Secretary, Carole Bury stood down in September 2019. The Revd Arthur has taken minutes at several PCC meetings but we now need to find a suitable volunteer as soon as possible! In July the PCC were able to have a conducted tour of the diocesan offices at Church House followed by a visit to the Cathedral Treasury where the archivist allowed us to handle the Elkstone chalice which is engraved with a date of 1720.

Coberley and Cowley - Michael Dykes has continued as solo churchwarden although thankfully Anne Jones has given informal support at Coberley. Gill Clark is serving as PCC Secretary as well as

chair of the Cowley fete committee. After over 25 years as Cowley's Treasurer Adrian Montague-Smith retired in December 2019 but has generously remained as book keeper until someone else volunteers to become the Treasurer. Alan Lowe started as Stratton's Treasurer then became Coberley's treasurer and more recently has taken over from Adrian as Benefice Treasurer!



**Michael, Margaret, Viv, Adrian and Cliff**

Colesbourne - Sir Henry Elwes has been serving for over 50 years as churchwarden in the parish church of St James at Colesbourne. He has continued serving alone. Supported by Lady Carolyn as Secretary. Arthur Cole was Treasurer until March 2019 and then Amanda Morgan kindly took over this responsibility.

Safeguarding Officer - After five years of serving as Safeguarding Officer for the Northern parishes, Mary Blackburn has decided to retire in April. Fortunately, Dr Marie Owen who plays the organ at Coberley and Cowley has kindly offered to take over! If as hoped, Marie's offer is approved at forthcoming PCC meetings, she will start on 1<sup>st</sup> May. Safeguarding has shot to the top of the CofE's agenda following the BBC2 documentary "Exposed: The Church's Darkest Secret".

## **7. The relatively new Parish of Coberley and Cowley**

The new parish received legal recognition on 1<sup>st</sup> February 2019 and has continued with the same pattern of worship for the past two years. The combined congregation is usually not much larger than when the two parish churches were worshipping separately. It is becoming increasingly apparent that very few villager residents are interested in supporting Sunday services. The treasurers for St Mary's and St Giles anticipate there are sufficient financial reserves to keep the worship going for a few more years. Most PCC meetings have been cheerful and constructive although occasionally there have been some unpleasant exchanges which have been damaging to morale especially for the representatives from Coberley.

## **8. Benefice magazine and website**

Communication has continued to be a priority. "Parish Link" magazine is the church's most obvious

expression of outreach into parishes.. Corinna Bramley the editor has managed to secure additional advertising but in February 2019 the annual subscription had to be raised from £7.00 to £10.00. Extra copies of the magazine have been distributed by Lynn Joy around Cowley in the hope that more residents will subscribe. Clergy and readers take it in turns to write the pastoral letters which are often well received. Some of the material in Parish Link is used by a separate magazine circulating around Stratton, Baunton, Bagendon and North Cerney as well as Rendcomb having their own glossy magazine in colour! In 2019, Arthur wrote a series of articles about short walks in each of the nine parishes and at the start of 2020 these were compiled into a new booklet "Short Walks in the Churn Valley". The booklet consists of 56 pages of text, maps and photographs. Margaret and Arthur have paid for the printing which means that every £5.00 donated for a booklet goes straight into the funds of the local PCC.

Arthur built a new CVB website in November 2017 (<http://www.churnvalley.org.uk>) and during 2019 this was given a front-page layout. During the past year he has also enhanced CVB content on the CofE's website for parish churches known as "A Church Near You". The four Northern parishes each have their own website containing relevant local information; for example, ACNY at Coberley enables visitors to download the churchyard survey showing burial plots whilst ACNY at Elkstone has a slideshow of the wildflower meadow.

The CVB has a Facebook group which is useful for informal messaging. In the past four years the membership has gradually grown and currently stands at 37.

## 9. Events

Colesbourne PCC has been particularly active in fund raising for roof repairs which were successfully completed thanks mostly to an extremely generous donation from someone who wished to remain anonymous. Fund raising events have included a Barn Dance, Quiz Night and of course the annual snowdrops weekends.

Elkstone PCC has been very busy fund-raising for the bells to be refurbished. The Victorian fittings and running gear were found to be suffering from wood rot and worm. Fund-raising for the target of £40,000 got off to a good start thanks to Sylvie Pierce in memory of David, her late husband. Brian Howlett already had experience from the eco-loo project which proved very helpful for the bells project. The PCC are grateful to captain of the bells, Simon Ridley, who has served as project manager without charging a fee. Simon arranged for a special bell rig to be erected during the annual open gardens in June. The bells were removed in October and taken to be tuned by White's of Appleton. They are due back in May and the Bishop of Tewkesbury has agreed to lead a special service of dedication at some point.



In March 2019 Arthur visited a village near Leek in Staffordshire known as "The Elkstones" (upper and lower). He received such a warm welcome that he returned in June for their flower festival accompanied by Ronnie, Sylvie and Margaret. There are several interesting similarities between ourselves and The Elkstones. We are hoping to keep in touch and possibly create an informal link between the villages.

Cowley village fete was held on 18<sup>th</sup> May in a lakeside position by kind permission of Cowley Manor. and generated an amazing £3,500 towards the upkeep of St Mary's parish church. Special thanks are due to the fete committee which was chaired by Gill Clark. We were sad to lose Sara Crocombe at Deerpark who has moved to be warden of the Scottish National Guide Centre near Peebles in Scotland. At present tables, books and bric-a-brac are being stored in various places but the PCC needs to find a better solution such as a dedicated metal shed hidden away in the grounds of Cowley churchyard.



Paul and Phil organizing the dog show at Cowley fete

Coberley fete was held on August Bank Holiday. It was an afternoon of so much hot sunshine that we ran out of ice cream for a while. The fete was great for building up the life of the community and raised over £3,300 for the parish church of St Giles. Special thanks are due to the fete committee chaired by Mary and Lyndsey.

## 10. Building projects and churchyards

Mixed progress was made on various quite costly building projects:

- Colesbourne PCC are currently seeking DAC permission to replace part of the churchyard wall with a hedge.
- Elkstone PCC have been pre-occupied with the bells project that is now nearing completion.
- Coberley's plans for a composting toilet were put on hold during 2018 and the architect's drawings are now ready for submission to the DAC; hopefully during 2020.
- Cowley parish church has needed a lot of work to repair a handrail, maintain the yew hedge, investigate repeated false fire alarms and prepare for much needed decorating of the interior walls. Special thanks are due to Michael Dykes, Gill Clark, Edward Hollingworth and Adrian Montague-Smith.

**"But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house if we hold onto our courage and the hope of which we boast."**

Hebrews 3:6