



The Parish of Upper Coquetdale

St Michael & All
Angels
Alwinton

St Michael & All
Angels
Alnham

All Saints
Rothbury

Christ Church
Hepple

St Andrews
Thropton

St Mary the
Virgin
Holystone



Parish Upper Coquetdale, Parish Profile approved by PCC 5th December 2024

The Diocese of Newcastle is the Church of England's most northerly diocese. This Diocese in the 'land of the Northern Saints' was formed in 1882 and comprises **169** parishes across **2,110** square miles. The Diocese covers the local authorities of Northumberland, Newcastle, North Tyneside and also small parts of County Durham and Cumbria. The **12** deaneries within **2** archdeaconries serve a population of about **831,600** people across a variety of communities ranging from sparse rural to large inner-city areas of deprivation.



Welcome to the diocese of Newcastle!

Thank you so much for your interest in this role, and I hope you enjoy reading the information contained in this brochure and will find it helpful for your discernment. These are exciting and challenging times in the Diocese of Newcastle. Exciting because we are at an early stage of a new season, challenging because like many dioceses we face conversations about our future and how best we use and deploy our resources. Our Deanery Development work has engaged every parish and benefice in renewed conversations about mission and ministry, and we are in a process of entering a new phase in that work, mapping out our renewed strategy and vision. Our outward facing values of 'seeking, sharing, sending' stem from a commitment to be a Church turning outwards in mission and ministry, and younger and more diverse by: **SEEKING** through being open to God's transforming love; **SHARING** through being generous with God's transforming gifts; **SENDING** through being engaged in God's transforming work in the world. I am looking for clergy who are excited about the opportunities and challenges we face, who are happy to work collaboratively and imaginatively with colleagues, and who can inspire communities to roll up their sleeves and get stuck into God's mission, by affirming, enabling, and encouraging lay and clergy together. As your Bishop, I am committed to your wellbeing and development, and I would love to explore with you whether God may be calling you to this role.



The Rt Revd Dr Helen-Ann Hartley
Bishop of Newcastle

The Parish of Upper Coquetdale

Parish Profile

A statement prepared by the Parish of Upper Coquetdale PCC

	Page
Introduction	6
Our Story - where we came from	8
Upper Coquetdale today	8
People	8
Employment	8
Connectivity	9
Tourism and Visitors	9
Social and Community Activity	10
Schools	10
Health & Social Care	10
Places	11
Mission and Ministry	12
Our Ministry	12
Sunday & Weekday Services	13
Working together across the parish	14
One Parish, six churches and what we do	17
St Michael & All Angels, Alnham	17
St Michael & All Angels, Alwinton	18
St Mary the Virgin, Holystone	18
All Saints, Rothbury	20
Christ Church, Hepple	21
St Andrews, Thropton	22
Buildings and Finance	23



The Parish of Upper Coquetdale



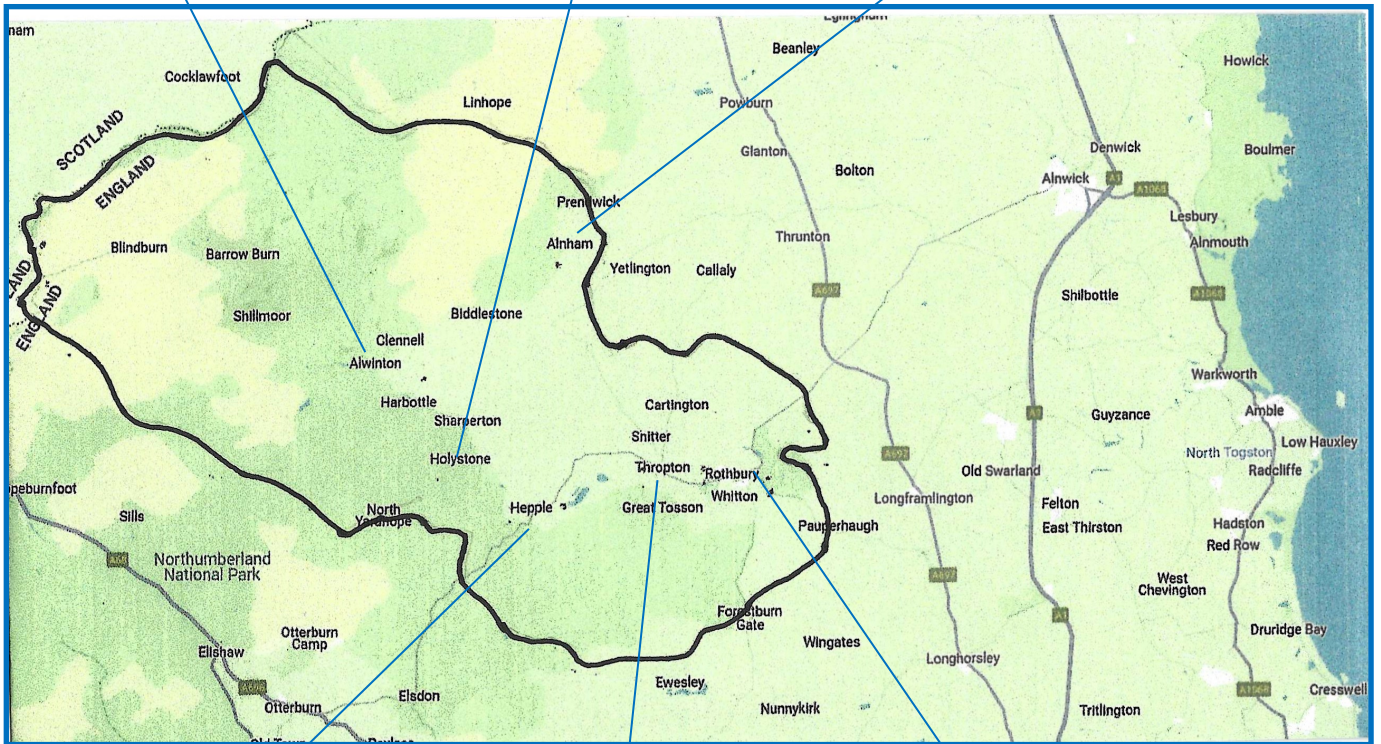
Alwinton St Michael & All Angels



Holystone St Mary the Virgin



Alnham St Michael & All Angels



Hepple Christ Church

Thropton St Andrew

Rothbury All Saints



Introduction - where we are and what we're looking for

Where we are

- a United Benefice and Parish with six churches, one PCC and three DCCs in a beautiful part of rural north Northumberland striving to **'Share God's Love, Grow Together, Enjoy Community'**
- our churches and communities are very generous and caring with a notable ability to pull together in response to disasters such as flooding, Storm Arwen, the war in Ukraine and during the pandemic
- we try to make everybody feel welcome, comfortable and safe in our churches, whether at services, when used for social events or just 'drop in'
- we recognise the need for change and that this may be challenging and uncomfortable. There are however significant opportunities here. We want to build on our strengths, including our work with schools and families. We recognise that change will need us to be more courageous and be receptive to new ideas both in our churches and in the community
- much of our energy is currently spent on 'keeping the show on the road' - particularly maintaining our six churches and raising the funds needed. Over the past decade or so this has squeezed out a focus on our higher purpose, our mission as members of Christ's church here. We recognize that we need to reset our direction and need the help and guidance of an energetic and determined leader. We want to be able to take a longer term, more sustained view, energised to do more to bring God's love and Gospel to a wider constituency, to be a visible Christian presence in service to all, whether church goes or not, and encourage more people to become engaged in formal and informal roles
- our congregations have held up since the pandemic although most members are over 70. We recognise that without renewal our Christian presence is vulnerable. We want to develop a younger, more diverse and inclusive demographic, reaching out to new communities
- we want to become more sustainable by increasing our financial resources, especially through regular planned giving to cover more than our collective parish share, and by collaborating, sharing skills and supporting each other, whilst respecting the individuality and traditions of our communities and churches. We want to make better use of our buildings and contribute to wider efforts to increase the sustainability of God's world.



What we're looking for

We are excited by the prospect of a new incumbent with the experience, energy and vision to lead and support us in discovering and delivering God's purpose here, bringing His Gospel of love and hope to all.

We hope and pray for someone who will help and inspire us to discern and deliver a clear long term vision for mission and ministry throughout the parish which helps us to

- grow in faith and confidence to be active disciples of Christ
- see where God is working amongst us
- develop a younger, more diverse and inclusive demographic
- reach out and serve all parts of the parish, including areas which are currently 'unchurched,' trying some new activity in unusual places
- be brave in trying new things, supporting each other, working together to make best use of our skills and resources in God's service
- be more sustainable in all we do

Who will

- support and encourage lay development, both formal and informal, to share in mission, outreach and administration
- be an attentive and empathetic listener and an effective communicator with a sense of humour, be a pragmatist, able to enthuse and engage others in participating, get things going and see them through to a timely conclusion

And has

- a deep understanding of, and commitment to, the joys and challenges of ministry in a deeply rural multi-church parish.



Our story - where we came from

The Parish of Upper Coquetdale covers around 150 square miles and is classified as 'remote rural'. The scenery is spectacular, much lying within the Northumberland National Park. There are some 3900 people around half of whom live in Rothbury

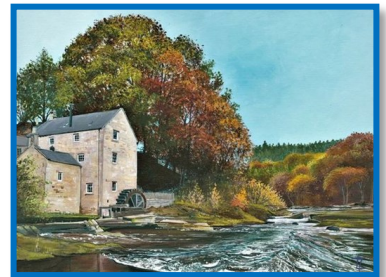
Inhabited for over 5000 years and fought over by the Border Reivers, there are many earthworks and fortifications, castles and historic houses. It is in the Land of the Northern Saints with five of the parish's churches having Saxon or Norman origins, a strong emergence of Roman Catholicism and non-conformism in the 18th / 19th centuries and two Anglican church plants created at the turn of the 20th century.

In a time of societal and demographic change, we relish the opportunities that a new incumbent will help us to realise so that the church in Upper Coquetdale is a vibrant discipleship of God's love and message of hope throughout the parish.

Harbottle Castle



Thrum Mill, Rothbury



Upper Coquetdale today

People

The population of Upper Coquetdale is slightly older than average and ageing, although this is being partially offset by younger people moving into new housing developments in the **lower part** of the valley. This is bringing a changing dynamic and social structure to the area as Gen Z moves away and commuting increases.

The Index of Multiple Deprivation was 5853 in 2019, slightly below the middle of the national range, but there is wide variation from many people on low wages (the recently established Coquetdale Food Bank regularly supports c20 households), to retired professionals, to some with very considerable wealth.

The overriding characteristic is that people get on, are kind and support each other, and look out for each other as during Storm Arwen, the pandemic, floods and power-cuts.

Employment

The most remote upland area of the parish is in the ownership of the MOD and is an active training area.

Rothbury is the principal service centre for the wider area providing employment in a wide range of commercial and retail businesses, in health and personal social care, professional services, trades (including apprenticeship opportunities), catering and hospitality. Elsewhere, primary industries (agriculture - mostly sheep and native cattle, forestry and quarrying, including the red gravel used on the forecourt of Buckingham Palace) remain important, although employment numbers are now much reduced.

Home based, online micro businesses and self employment are increasing particularly in personal services, social care and tourism. Many people now work outside the valley and commute to Alnwick, Morpeth, Newcastle



or further afield. Work opportunities for young people are becoming more limited and few students return after tertiary education.

Despite the significant recent housing development (mostly by companies from outside the area, resulting in limited local jobs) there is considerable pressure on housing. Second homes and holiday cottages have reduced availability of rental property. Increasing costs impact people on already low wages and there are currently few 'affordable' new builds.

More frequent and more severe flooding and storms are influencing the course of the river and agriculture and forestry. Changes in subsidies and rewilding also bring uncertainty about future employment and sustainability.

Connectivity

Car dependency is high in every age group. There is an approximately hourly bus service from Thropton via Rothbury to Morpeth and Newcastle, and three bus services a day between Rothbury and Alnwick. Three times a week there is a newly enhanced Community Transport service around the valley. There is also a local taxi service and a community taxi service when needed for medical appointments.

Home delivery is popular and includes many of the local food producers and a regular mobile fishmonger, milk deliveries and hardware / outdoor goods. Alongside this, access to personal and business financial services has reduced significantly with Post Offices relocating and switching to shorter hours and banks closing – the nearest bank branches in Alnwick both close in May 2025.

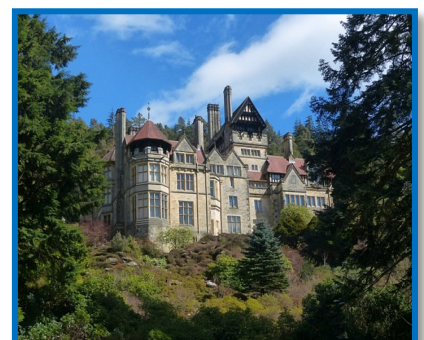
The nearest rail links are at Alnmouth and Morpeth (each about 40 minutes drive from Rothbury). Both are on the East Coast Main Line. Newcastle International Airport is about 45 minutes away.

The extension of highspeed internet and mobile phone coverage is improving contact between people and reducing isolation, although the introduction of digital technology is already creating safety concerns in an area where lengthy power cuts are relatively common particularly where mobile phone coverage is also poor.

Tourism and Visitors

The history, beauty, varied landscapes and habitats, high quality local produce, proximity to spectacular empty beaches and the attraction to pilgrims exploring Christian heritage are all an increasing draw to visitors and holidaymakers alike. These are growing in number and are a real opportunity for mission.

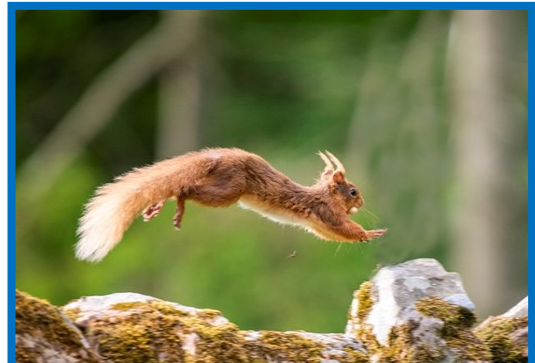
Cragside House, Rothbury



All types of accommodation are available from cottages and caravans sites to hotels. Ideal for all outdoor activities, the built environment chronicles the history of the area from iron age to the present day and includes Cragside, now owned by the National Trust, just outside Rothbury.

Social and community activity

There is a wide range of activities, sports, clubs and events ranging from local history, to red squirrels, film society, Coquetdale Amateur Dramatics Society - including CADS Juniors for budding actors, U3A, folk music, concerts and choirs. The WI is strong and there are four agricultural shows, Christmas lights and carols. There is some provision for children and young people including the Kids' Club at Thropton, uniformed organisations (Scouts, Brownies, Guides and Cadets), and Young Farmers, although most - particularly for older children - is school-based.



Schools

The area, exceptionally, remains three tier, appropriate to the dispersed population. There are three First Schools: a Church of England school at Harbottle and two non church schools, at Thropton and Rothbury. Each has kindergarten / nursery provision. Dr Thomlinson's Church of England Middle School is in Rothbury and serves the whole area and beyond. It has around 220 pupils (one in eight eligible for school meals). After Year 8 children go to King Edward V1 School (KEVI) in Morpeth. School buses, or taxis for the most remote areas, are provided to transport the children to and from school. With the exception of Rothbury First School, the other three local schools are part of the same Academy Trust.

Health and Social Care

Rothbury Community Hospital houses the General Practice and includes Community Nurses, an NHS Dentist, Physiotherapy and a Wellbeing Counsellor. There is also a small branch surgery in Harbottle with limited opening hours. The Hospital has fourteen inpatient beds available for respite, recuperation, rehabilitation, end of life care and - according to need - longer term residential care. Surprisingly, given the demography of the parish, there are no longer any residential homes for the elderly although there are three small specialist homes for people with SENDs

A full range of hospital provision for outpatient and inpatient care is available within reasonable distance including Cramlington Specialist Emergency Hospital, the Wansbeck General Hospital at Ashington, Alnwick Infirmary (respite, chemotherapy, minor injuries,) together with further specialist hospitals in Newcastle.

Places

Rothbury is the established service centre and also has the Rectory for the parish. Within commuting distance of Newcastle as well as Morpeth and Alnwick, Rothbury grew by around 20% between 2001 and 2021 to 2200. New, mostly executive housing development with more planned, is bringing younger / middle aged people and early retirees to the lower part of the valley.



At the gateway to the Upper Coquetdale Valley, Rothbury has much to offer tourists as well as being a very attractive village in its own right. It is well provided with a wide range of independent shops, a new Co-op supermarket incorporating a Post Office, a Boots pharmacy, businesses (from trades to IT and professional services), pubs and eateries / take-aways, craft shops and an arts centre and library. There are two ATMs. There is also a small industrial estate providing local employment, and two veterinary practices.

Rothbury Recreation Club provides tennis courts, a bowls green and five-a-side. There are football and cricket clubs and a golf course. The well equipped Jubilee Hall hosts every type of community activity and event from society meetings to the annual pantomime.

Thropton is just two miles away with a population of c800. There has been small scale housing development recently and more is planned (including some affordable housing) and there is a new SPAR supermarket with fuel station with EV chargers and an ATM. The village has a first school, a popular restaurant / hotel, a Music Centre and an active Memorial Hall with warm hub accreditation and providing fortnightly lunches for the wider community.



'Up the Valley'

Upstream, most of the parish is either in the national park or overlooked by it and new development is strictly limited. Whilst the main villages are dispersed and distinctive, people are supportive and friendly across settlements and with outlying areas.

Hepple is a former estate village and the home of Hepple Gin. There is a church, an active village hall and a rare example of a Post Office open six days a week.

Holystone has a strong Christian heritage centred on the former Augustinian Nunnery and a site of pilgrimage since Roman times.

Biddlestone Chapel



Castle Hill Camp, Alnham

Lady's Well, Holystone



Harbottle is home to the Church of England first school, The Star pub which provides bar meals and houses the village shop, and has the remains of a mediaeval castle.

Netherton has a well-used village hall, a particularly popular Gardening Club and, like a number of villages, an active WI. **Biddlestone** is a tiny hamlet where there is a Roman Catholic Chapel which was part of the now demolished Biddlestone Hall. Owned by The Historic Chapels Trust, this little gem is used for one or two ecumenical services a year.

Alwinton, the last settlement of any size in the valley is within a few miles of the Scottish border. It has a church, a pub serving a wide choice of food and the last agricultural show of the season, which is very popular throughout the county. Beyond this, there are individual farms and properties, many still off grid.

Alnham is geographically in the Vale of Whittingham. There are no longer any independent social facilities, but the recent refurbishment of the church now provides a flexible multifunction community space.

Mission and Ministry

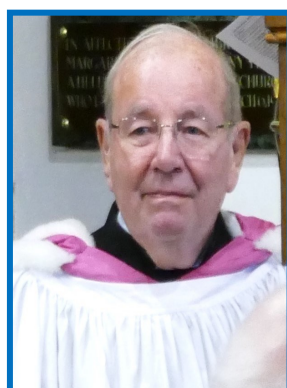
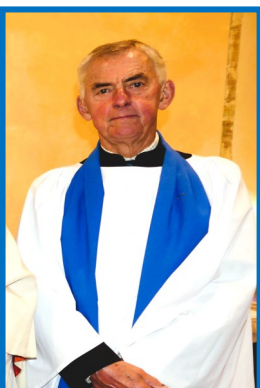
Across the parish our six churches aim to **Share God's Love, Grow Together** and **Enjoy Community**, seeking to discover God's purpose for us here as His presence in our local communities. Some things we do together, others relate to specific churches and communities.

Our Ministry

Our ministry team consists of the Rector, a part time Associate Priest with PTO, three retired clergy with PTO, a Reader and a Licensed Lay Minister. Lay members lead Evensong, conduct Morning Prayer, read lessons, lead prayers and intercessions, and administer the sacraments. The tradition of worship in all our churches is 'Mainstream Anglican', mostly eucharistic, and includes two BCP services a month.



**Rev'd Canon Bob Burston, Rev'd Dr Rosie Stacey,
Rev'd John Wylam, Rev'd Captain John Storey.**



David Carey (Reader) John Farndale (Licensed Lay Minister)

Sunday and weekday services

	Sunday 1	Sunday 2	Sunday 3	Sunday 4	Sunday 5	Wednesday	
Hepple	0900 HC (BCP)		0900 HC		10.30am UCCT Joint Service (Rotating around churches of all denominations)		
Thropton		0900 HC (BCP)		0900 HC			
Alnham	10.30 HC						
Rothbury	10.30 Morning Prayer: Lay Led	10.30 HC 17.30 Evening Prayer (Lay Led)	10.30 HC	10.30 HC 17.30 Evening Prayer (Lay Led)			09.30 HC
Alwinton	10.30 HC		10.30 HC				
Holystone		10.30 HC		10.30 HC			

HC Holy Communion; BCP Book of Common Prayer ; Weekday Holy Communion not always led by Rector

Whilst most services have been led by the Rector, there are also other clergy with PTO who lead services and Evening Prayer is routinely lay-led.

There is a Reader-led bible study group in Rothbury and until recently there was a weekly prayer group held in a yurt in the school field at Harbottle. Between 2019 and 2022 twelve adults and children were confirmed. This included two young people brought to Christ through Messy Church. There have been no confirmations in the last two years.



**Confirmation Candidates from
Messay Church**

Key Statistics

	Parish	Alnham	Alwinton/Holystone	Rothbury/Hepple/ Thropton
Electoral Roll	161	21	34	106
Average Sunday Attendance	85	12	16	57

Numbers have remained roughly constant over a number of years. Most church members are over retirement age (many significantly so) and most have returned to church post-pandemic, although losses (ill health, death) are not being replaced by new worshippers. We aim to offer a warm welcome to everybody in all of our churches, particularly seasonal attenders - people visiting, on holiday, caravan and second home owners.

	Parish	Alnham	Alwinton/Holystone	Rothbury/ Hepple/
Baptisms	2	1	1	0
Weddings	4	0	2	2
Funerals	19	0	3	16
First Schools	3	0	1	2
Middle Schools	1	0	0	1

All our churches are open all day every day except that All Saints Rothbury is closed overnight.

With the exception of Thropton which is not licenced for weddings, our churches are all licensed for baptisms, weddings and funerals. The churches of Alnham, Alwinton, Hepple and Holystone all have open burial grounds.

Working together across the parish

In addition to our PCC (the responsible body), we have three District Church Councils. Prior to the Parish of Upper Coquetdale being created in 2004, these were separate parishes. The current governance structure was put in place in 2011 and we are still working through some aspects of this, in particular the tensions between legal and financial responsibility (the PCC) and operational practicalities (the DCCs). We have a full complement of Churchwardens and most positions on the PCC and DCCs are filled although there is some doubling up.

Churchwardens



Left to Right:
Margaret Pope - Rothbury
Sue Bowmer - Rothbury
Margy Tasker-Brown - Hepple
Lesley Cowe - Thropton



Christine Nicholson **Jenny Sordy**
Alnham

Left to Right:
Helen Holmes - Holystone
Marion Farndale - Holystone
Jackie Bickmore - Alwinton
Julia Stott - Alwinton



Mission

Together we want to strengthen our sense of purpose and vision, united in our love of Christ, of our communities and each other. Beyond sharing our simple strapline however, we have not worked through or agreed a unifying vision and what it means in terms of priorities for mission and what we do, despite a number of short-lived attempts.

Of late we have tended to be preoccupied by differences and processes rather than keeping our sights clearly on purpose and working together. Upper Coquetdale is a broad parish spanning a wide range of views, but there is more that joins us together in Christ's service than separates us. A new incumbent will find a ready pool of dedicated people, both on committees and not, who are longing for and committed to change but need help and leadership in defining what that future 'looks like' and delivering it.

PCC at work December 2024



Safeguarding

We take safeguarding seriously and strive to make all our activities and buildings safe, welcoming and inclusive. Safeguarding is a routine item on every PCC and DCC agenda and our policy is reviewed annually. We have a very active and conscientious Parish Safeguarding Officer who keeps us well informed and up to date and seeks to ensure that the appropriate training requirements are met and absolute confidentiality is observed.

Messy Church

Our main outreach to new Christians, Messy Church, is now thirteen years old and has a solid membership of eight. It meets on a Sunday afternoon, in the Parish Rooms and attracts a wide age range from toddlers to a young man of sixteen who has Down's Syndrome and an elderly gentleman with SEND who has attended regularly since the beginning. Messy Church meets monthly.

Parents also enjoy participating in the craft activities, worship and a pooled meal. Work completed in the session is displayed in All Saints Church and attracts interest from visitors and regulars alike.

Social media including a Facebook page advertises activities and those recently baptised are on our mailing list. We are looking forward to getting internet access in the Parish Rooms, to extend the range of activities available within our worship. We have 6/7 regular helpers and two reserves, but not all attend every session. All are currently from the Anglican churches.



Messy Work November 2024

Mothers' Union

Upper Coquetdale has an active branch of the Mothers' Union with 21 members. Meetings have included speakers (eg People's Kitchen which provides a safe haven for vulnerable people in Newcastle) and Dementia Friendly training. Members make up bags for People's Kitchen and raise money through coffee mornings and stalls at local events for projects supported by the diocese.

Eco Church

We are committed to Eco Church and safeguarding the environment, seeking ways of becoming more sustainable and caring for God's world. Our commitment includes praying at least weekly for creation and the environment and a different prayer is included in our weekly pew sheets. Environmental information is available in each of our churches including details specifically related to churches and also to deanery and diocesan activity. These are all updated regularly.

All six churches have now received Eco Church Bronze awards and all are working towards Silver accreditation.

Our Eco Champion is a member of Alnwick Deanery Environmental Group, and also participates in diocesan activity and local cross sector initiatives. This provides an opportunity to bring a church perspective and share more widely what we are doing.

Keeping informed

Keeping people informed is especially important in a geographically dispersed area and we always need to do more to communicate effectively. Increasingly we are transitioning from paper based to online although in many cases hybrid arrangements remain to cater for areas where internet services are poor or usage levels low.

Weekly Pew Sheet Produced weekly by a member of the congregation, this provides details of church events and services along with the readings, collect and post communion prayer. It is distributed electronically to around 150 contacts every week reaching far beyond those attending church services on any particular Sunday. Hard copies are also available in the churches.

Noticeboards Both inside and outside our churches, these continue to be a quick and easy source of information and we try hard to keep them up to date and attractive!

Website coquetdale@anglican.org Although containing copies of the weekly pewsheets, reposting some other publicly available information and some historical details, the parish website is in serious need of overhaul where we need some skilled help

Social media Our use of social media is limited and we have no dedicated operational Facebook page.

Upper Coquetdale Churches Together (UCCT)

When the parish was first created, the six Anglican churches, the Roman Catholic churches at Rothbury and Thropton, the United Reformed Church (Rothbury) and the Christian Fellowship at Armstrong Hall, Thropton joined together to form Upper Coquetdale Churches Together, signing a covenant to work together. This is renewed annually.

Walk of Witness



UCCT activity includes a well attended combined service rotating around each place of worship on the fifth Sunday (online throughout the pandemic), enormously popular harvest thanksgiving and carol services in the Rothbury Auction Mart, a candle-lit Advent service at Biddlestone Chapel, Lent lunches, Good Friday Walk of Witness and a Sunrise Service on Easter Sunday next to Simonside. Café Church is a new informal gathering held on a Sunday every other month at 4pm in Harbottle Village Hall and the first Walk Through the Bible looking at the context provided by the Old Testament is planned for February 2025



Carols at the Mart

Outreach includes the Open the Book tent at Harbottle, Thropton and Alwinton shows, and the Upper Coquetdale Bereavement Visiting Service, now in its nineteenth year. Providing a listening service and point of contact, the Bereavement Visitors are all volunteers who receive regular training and supervision to ensure high standards of support which is professional, responsive and compassionate.

Our church and community magazine **Over The Bridges** otb@coquetdale.net is produced five times a year under the auspices of UCCT by the Upper Coquetdale News Group and is delivered to homes throughout Coquetdale as well as being available on-line. The magazine is free and is paid for by advertisers and donations.

In parallel, Co-Net, which has screens in prominent positions throughout the valley, provides on line access to regularly updated information about what is going on.

One parish, six churches and what we do

Our churches and our communities are all different. But they are all loved and generally the churches are well maintained, with action taken to keep on top of Quinquennial Inspection recommendations and other repairs. Often minor repairs are undertaken by volunteers and cleaning teams include non churchgoers, as often do flower arrangers.

The 2024 round of Inspections is currently underway. Reports for three of the six churches have now been received (St Michael's Alnham, St Mary's Holystone and All Saints Rothbury) with the remaining churches programmed for inspection in the early part of 2025. Very little work is identified as 'urgent', other than work to the water table at Holystone. No major structural problems have been identified although ongoing work is needed to keep on top of roof repairs and damp, and a new heating system using renewable energy is recommended for All Saints at some point.

St Michael and All Angels, Alnham (Grade 1)

Our church building

St Michael and All Angels church is of Saxon foundation and replaced an earlier building thought to have been on the nearby Roman camp. The present church dates largely from the late 12th - early 13th centuries - the earliest written record is 1135. The church was restored in 1870 - a time of significant church restoration in the valley - and in 1953.



Out of Town Display

St Michael's has had a new lease of life following work undertaken in 2018/19. Funded by a major Heritage Lottery grant, donations and fundraising, there is now a kitchen, WC, heating and internet. The pews have been replaced by chairs enabling a range of different open space or seating configurations. The church is essentially a multi-function community asset. Primarily, however it is still a place of worship.

The open churchyard is maintained by the congregation, assisted by sheep.

Our congregation

The majority of attendees live in Alnham, with regular worshippers also coming from Netherton and some cross over with St Mary's Holystone and St Michael's Alwinton who also support our fundraising. Since the pandemic, there has been a degree of renewal and we hope to build on this.

There is a long-standing association with the Kings Priory School in Tynemouth whose choirs come to St Michael's and participate in special services such as Remembrance Sunday and at Christmas - normally standing room only!

Church in community

As part of our community activities, we host an annual village summer lunch. This is a key fund-raising and social event attracting almost 100 people in 2024 reminding people of the enduring presence of their church. We have also hosted talks, exhibitions, bat, bird and dark sky watches and held commemorative services for two local shepherds who died during a blizzard in 1962.

St Michael and All Angels Alwinton (Grade 2*) and St Mary the Virgin Holystone (Grade 2)

Our church buildings

St Michael and All Angels

Records for Alwinton Church go back to 1180; it became a parish church in about 1375. A small part of the building dates from the 12th and 13th centuries but most of it was rebuilt in the mid-19th century. The Biddlestone Porch was refurbished in the 1980s to provide kitchen facilities. It is heated with gas and overhead electric heaters.



St Mary the Virgin, Holystone

Whilst the present church dates from the mid-19th century, it is built on the site of a medieval Augustinian nunnery and has roots going back to St Ninian and to St Paulinus who is reputed to have baptized 3000 people in 627 at The Lady's Well (or St Ninian's Well) at the edge of the village. St Mungo is also commemorated by a second well close to the church boundary.

Archaeological excavations in 2015 and 2016 revealed quite substantial remains of the nunnery adjacent to the south wall of the church together with medieval artefacts including gravestones. Well researched, displayed and interpreted, these could help to throw light on the history of mediaeval Holystone and the origins and growth of the early church. This would provide a focus for renewal both locally and with visitors and pilgrims. Work is underway to explore options.

Our congregation

Our two churches work closely together, with largely the same congregation and joint activities and fundraising. The church community is primarily older folk, supplemented by seasonal visitors, and on festivals (especially at Christmas) there is a good turnout of families and children.

Every year, Ascension Day communion services are held at The Lady's Well, a beautiful, tranquil and spiritually uplifting place. The village probably owes its existence to the Well, which is often visited by tourists and walkers.

Church in Community

A notable characteristic of our two churches is the huge amount of fundraising we do, much of which attracts people who do not normally have contact with the church. This includes an annual Curry Night, regular Bingo and Quiz Nights in both local pubs, a regular summer Pimm's & Canapes party, a bonfire party -all generously hosted by members of the congregation, Christmas cake stalls at Alwinton and Harbottle shows and home-made preserves and teas - to mention just a few! We are a small congregation, but we make up for it in energy.



Curry Night 2024

Pimm's Party



In the wider community, we have been keenly involved in Harbottle C of E First School where the churches have had three active governors. The school is a small but very vibrant one with a strong Christian ethos and recognised recently by Ofsted as being at the heart of the village community. The school has its Christmas Nativity in church and attends other services such as Harvest Festival, Christingle and the Crib Service. The work of the children is displayed at the back of Alwinton church and there is a strong partnership between pupils, their families and the church.

Following the closure of the village Post Office around five years ago the Post Office now operates from Holystone Church for two hours every Monday, which is greatly appreciated.

Rothbury, Hepple and Thropton

All Saints Rothbury (Grade 2*)

Our church building

All Saints is thought to date from 1220, although part of a finely carved Saxon cross which is now the base of the font suggests a rather earlier foundation. By 1850, in common with a number of churches in the valley, substantial repairs were needed and most of the church was taken down and rebuilt. Today's church retains much of that Victorian architectural character.

Over the past six years, the south aisle roof has been repaired and the north aisle roof re-slatted. The organ - reputedly one of the finest in Northumberland - has been refurbished and relocated in the nave revealing beautifully decorated organ pipes, improving sound quality and enabling its use from time to time for recitals.

A major reordering project involving heating and draughtproofing, converting the vestries to flexible spaces with an additional WC, a new external access, creating a new servery, removing pews and preparing a scheme for solar panels is currently 'on hold' as priority was given to addressing and funding leaks in the north aisle roof and consequential problems of internal damp.

A free of charge Internet connection to both All Saints and the Parish Hall has been promised by an internet service provider but it is uncertain whether this will materialise.

Capital works are reliant primarily on grants, donations and loans. Ongoing expenditure is mostly funded from regular giving, collections and fundraising including a produce stall and coffee mornings both held monthly, the card stall, plant, nearly new and carboot sales and the 100 club.



Our congregation

The congregation is relatively stable and ageing. Some younger retired people have joined the congregation recently. We recognise the critical importance of a younger (and more diverse) demographic and the opportunity that new housing development provides to strengthen our engagement with families and schools. Messy Church, where the majority of helpers worship at All Saints, makes an important contribution, but more is needed.

In addition to regular services there are also occasional civic services and special festivals. Christmas celebrations, including the Crib Service, visit by Santa Claus and switching on Christmas lights are all popular. Remembrance Sunday is also particularly well observed, both at the civic service in the church and at the cenotaph which involves the cadets, scouts, guides and brownies and the renowned Rothbury pipe band.

Banners: Father, Son and Holy Spirit



Church in community

Visitors like All Saints and there are over 100 appreciative entries in the visitors book every year. There is an enthusiastic team of bell ringers for the eight bells in the tower which attracts many visiting ringers. Recently a community herb garden has been established where all are welcome to join the weekly gardening sessions from April to November.

In addition to the social aspects of our fundraising, the church hosts occasional concerts, is used by the Traditional Music Festival, as a meeting space, a collection centre at times of international crisis and receives contributions to the local food bank. There is a lot going on.

Dr Thomlinson's Church of England Middle School has a strong Christian ethos and well established links with the church. The Rector has been an ex officio member of the Board of Governors with places for two PCC nominated governors. Traditionally the Rector has led collective worship and taken part in special services such as Harvest,

Saints Days and end of term services. The Middle School regularly holds services in All Saints and a former teacher who is a member of the congregation works with the pupil leads of the school houses (St Bede, St Cuthbert and St Aidan) in preparing Saints Days assemblies.

We have also hosted the school in events focusing on "What's in a church"; Easter; Saints and Pilgrimage.



Teddy Bear Trail

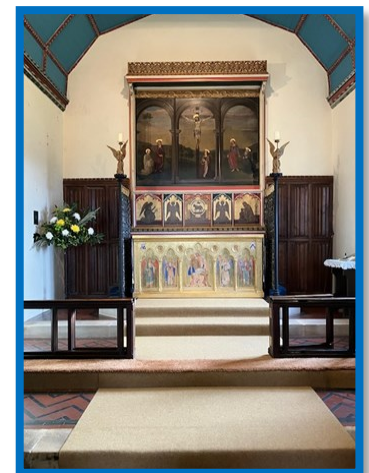


Collecting for Ukraine

Christ Church Hepple (Grade 2)

Our church building

With spectacular views over the River Coquet, Christ Church was founded as a chapel of ease to Rothbury Parish and consecrated by the first Bishop of Newcastle in 1894. Externally very simple the arts and crafts interior comes as a surprise. The south window shows St. Aidan, St. Gregory and St. Oswald. The font bowl (c12th century) and a number of other stone relics are from the old church of Hepple thought to be of Saxon origin, sited west of the current village and a Scheduled Ancient Monument.



The church fabric is well maintained. Since 2011 new electric heating has been installed, the roof replaced and external ground drainage improved. This has cost over £90K, which has been funded by a combination of Heritage Lottery grants, small grants and lots of local fundraising and donations. More recently, the adjacent

landowner has donated a strip of land which been transferred into church ownership to enable the graveyard to be extended when needed.

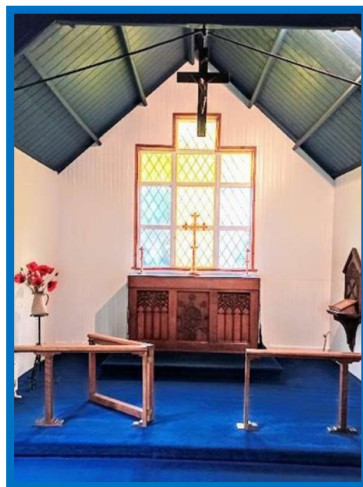
Our congregation

Christ Church congregation is, in the main, retired reflecting the make-up of the village. With regular attendance in the low teens, Christmas and Easter services continue to attract congregations of 35 - 40 with baptisms and funerals also being well attended.

Church in community

The village of Hepple is small (25 houses) and there is a strong community spirit with churchgoers and non-churchgoers joining together to organise and enjoy social and fundraising events for the church, the village hall and a wide range of charities, as well as carol singing, harvest suppers and undertaking routine jobs such as church cleaning and maintenance.

The church and hall are often used together particularly for life events, playing the village's strength - a cohort of generous and skilled cooks and bakers. The village hall, currently undergoing a significant upgrade which will also benefit the church, runs a range of popular activities including keep fit, basketry classes and table tennis club. It hosts a village library and provides a meeting place for WI, church committees and others. Well located in the middle of the parish both the hall and church attract attenders from beyond the village.



St Andrew Thropton

Our church building

St Andrew's is a modest wooden prefabricated church, built in 1902, funded by public subscription and built on land donated by Lord Armstrong. It is a dedicated church. The area surrounding the church is grassed. The original foot pumped pipe organ (in need of extensive repair) and some of the gas lamps remain in situ.

Electrical work was undertaken 2022. Other recent work includes roof repairs and pointing, replacement and painting the front door, repairs to some floorboards, treatment for woodworm and internal painting. In addition new lights, windows and a replacement electric organ have been installed. The congregation at St Andrew's is very generous and much of the work has been undertaken by volunteers or funded directly by members of the congregation rather than being a call on church funds.

Our congregation

St Andrew's congregation is, in the main, retired with a few younger people. There is some cross over with Christ Church Hepple and there is some evidence that numbers have increased slightly. People who do not come regularly to services and people who are non churchgoers enjoy the tranquility and simplicity of St Andrew's for times of quiet personal reflection and for the wonderful views of the valley.

Church in community

Thropton First School is opposite the Church. Although not a church school there are increasingly strong links with the church. The school holds its special services at St Andrew's (e.g. the annual leavers' assembly and harvest festival). These are events which the local community also enjoys. Groups of children from the school visit St Andrew's and some of their sketches from their research have been used to decorate the walls at Harvest time. We hope that this will be repeated and to build on this activity.

New housing development has taken place in Thropton over the past few years, and more is planned, providing opportunities for outreach and for St Andrew's to grow.

Buildings and Finance

Our buildings

Earlier in 2024 a new Rectory was purchased by the Diocese in Whitton View, Rothbury.



This modern family home has stunning views and is a double fronted, stone clad detached home with two reception rooms, a wood burner, kitchen diner, study, 4 bedrooms and two bathrooms. It has a double garage, driveway parking and a wrap around garden. It is within easy walking distance of the centre of the village.

The former Vicarage in Alwinton has not been used for ministry since 2009 and is leased by the Diocesan Board of Finance. The former Rectory in Rothbury is also leased.

The Parish Hall, built 1908, is next to All Saints. It has two meeting rooms each with a kitchen. Used extensively by local church and community groups, fee earning bookings fell during the pandemic. Whilst currently running at a slight loss, efforts are being made to further rejuvenate usage and there has been some increase in bookings recently.

Finance

Management of parish finances reflects the PCC/DCC structure, with the DCCs managing the income and expenditure for their own churches (including Parish Share). The PCC has very limited funds (some £270) of its own.

The last parish-wide generous giving initiative was in 2015, although Alnham had an appeal in 2021.

Although Rothbury Hepple Thropton was a pilot for the national Parish Giving Scheme, this has not been extended and there is a real opportunity to roll out the scheme across the whole parish.

All DCCs send letters of thanks to regular givers.

Key Parish Financials 2023

	Parish Total	Alnham	Alwinton/Holystone	Rothbury/Heppe/Thropton
Parish Share Paid	£44,100	£1,500	£6,600	£36,000
Planned Givers	92	6	15	71
Income	£102,100	£9,743	£31,042	£61,315
Expenditure	£93,663	£7,516	£24,976	£61,171
Reserves	£205,916	£28,659	£49,376	£127,880
Restricted	£157,759	£20,481	£30,598	£106,680
Liabilities	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Parish of Upper Coquetdale

Sharing God's love, growing together, enjoying community

St Michael & All
Angels
Alwinton

St Michael & All
Angels
Alnham

All Saints
Rothbury

Christ Church
Hepple

St Andrews
Thropton

St Mary the
Virgin
Holystone

