

Bishops Lydeard Benefice

Profile 2024



Font cover,
Bagborough



Spring at Cothelstone



School, Lydeard St Lawrence



Rogation Sunday, Shopnoller Farm



Harvest supper,
Combe Florey

Bishops Lydeard, St Mary – Bagborough, St Pancras
Combe Florey, Ss Peter & Paul – Cothelstone, St Thomas of Canterbury
Lydeard St Lawrence, St Lawrence



BENEFICE PROFILE

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DIOCESAN STATEMENT Our Vision for Growth and Transformation

Introduction

We are delighted that you are considering whether this post of Rector of the Benefice of Bishops Lydeard with Lydeard St Lawrence, Bagborough, Combe Florey and Cothelstone in the Diocese of Bath and Wells might be right for you. In order to help your prayerful discernment, we want to share part of our diocesan vision, within which we hope your own ministry might flourish.

Appointing a priest incumbent is amongst the most significant decisions that any benefice makes. When appointments work out well, they contribute significantly to parishes flourishing and growing in a host of different ways – in spiritual depth, in impact within local communities and in the numbers of people becoming part of the local church. Such flourishing is not, of course, all down to the person appointed as priest. It depends first and foremost upon God. It also depends upon everyone in a benefice being willing and able to contribute their unique gifts, skills, resources and abilities: working alongside their priest and sharing in the ministry of the benefice.

The flourishing and growth of churches always needs attention, but especially now as we come out of the shock created by the COVID pandemic. The impact of the pandemic created a sharp acceleration in the pattern of decline in church attendance that has been seen in our diocese over many years. Thankfully there are some signs that we are recovering from the COVID decline. For example, data showed that average adult weekly church attendance in our diocese rose between 2021 and 2022. Statistics only ever tell a partial story. It is even more encouraging to see churches around our diocese developing approaches that respond to the opportunities and challenges in their local context and enable growth to happen.

A vision for growth and transformation

Our diocesan context, described above, has convinced us that for our next season at least, our aim across all our parishes needs to be growing our churches, within and beyond our church buildings, in both numbers and depth of faith, so that we can better work for the transforming of our communities and the life of God's Kingdom amongst us.

Shared priorities

To help us pursue this aim, and following consultation across the diocese in 2023, we are inviting all parishes to focus on four particular areas of our ministry together. It is important for clergy considering working in our diocese to know what these priorities are, even though what they look like in practice will vary in each place.



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To value and cherish the people and resources we already have

We aim to ensure each person is well supported and equipped as a follower of Jesus Christ and for any ministries they may feel called to undertake, within the local church and wider community. We are committed to supporting the well-being of all our leaders and church officers, both lay and ordained. We have a fully funded clergy well-being service, the offer of peer support groups, and an excellent team of Diocesan support staff fully focused on supporting our parishes, chaplaincies and schools.

To develop new Christian worshipping communities

Whether it be new forms of worship in a wide variety of settings and times, church revitalisations or church plants, we long to see the good news of Jesus connect with the people in our communities that our traditional offerings struggle to reach.

To share in ministry and leadership

We are committed to the New Testament vision of the church as a vibrant body of people all using their God-given gifts. We are committed to a model of shared local ministry: raising up and equipping lay and ordained leaders able to share together in leading the church and serving God's world.

To deepen and grow faith

This is foundational to all we do. We long to see people of all ages and backgrounds, but perhaps especially children, young people and young adults, having more opportunities to discover, explore and grow in faith.

The outcome we are looking for

When he talks about his own ministry in 1 Corinthians, Paul captures the dynamic we are seeking to achieve. "I planted," he says, "Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Cor 3: 6). We know that our churches will only flourish and grow as a result of God's action among us – it is God who gives the growth.

But Paul is also clear that we have a part to play too – in watering and planting, in doing the things that enable the conditions for God's growth to be supported. So, covered by prayer, our confident hope is that if we are intentional in seeking God's guidance in planning and supporting growth, then God will honour that to see his people flourish and thrive - in spiritual depth, in impact within local communities, in the numbers of people becoming part of the local church and in transforming communities locally and beyond.

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Local shaping and diocesan support

There can't be any 'one size fits all' approach to turning the priorities outlined above into action. They always need to be adapted to local circumstances, opportunities and needs. The task of our diocesan support services is to get behind all that local benefices are doing and apart from their general support, there is specific support for exploring how to grow new Christian communities, how to discern and equip a growing range of ministries in your context and how to work well with children and young people. All of these areas of support are grounded in exploring what it means to live out our faith.

What implications does this have for the appointment of clergy?

It is important for us all to appoint clergy to benefices who are ready, willing and able to pray for and share in the vision we have for the flourishing and growth of churches and Christian life in our diocese. We want to create an environment that could be described as high challenge, high support. This means appointing clergy who will not only value all that already exists but will be eager to work with others to build on and develop it. It means appointing clergy who are committed to learning, being creative, and to starting with the gifts God has given to them, their benefice and the wider community. We are therefore looking to appoint candidates who will

- be committed to praying and intentionally seeking the growth and flourishing of the benefices in their care
- relish and expect to work in an environment that is high challenge, high support
- work joyfully and collaboratively with those who share with them locally in ministry and leadership, with their congregations and with others in their locality, to identify ways to grow and develop their churches with the grain of local priorities, resources, skills and passions
- enjoy working in partnership with deanery and diocesan colleagues

We hope this might be you! We hope that you'd like to join us on the adventure and course we've set for our next ten years. We're praying that God will send us the right labourers for the harvest that God has set before us. Could this be you?

+ Michael Barr & Wells.

Bishop of Bath and Wells

Simon Hill.

Archdeacon of Taunton



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TONE DEANERY STATEMENT

Thank you for considering joining this deanery. We pray for you as you respond to God's calling.

We are a deanery of 35 places of worship, both ancient and modern, and following our deployment process, we are now made up of 6 benefices, each with a Stipendiary post. In this mainly rural area, we are also fortunate to have many active and supportive retired priests and some experienced Readers.

This is a deanery committed to Lay training, Lay Worship Assistants, Pastoral Assistants and Chaplaincy, recognising the ongoing need for a Christian presence and representation in each of our communities. As a small Chapter we share our responsibilities for discernment of calling and training. We also hope to be a close network for supporting each other and sharing our wisdom and concerns. We have regular Greater Chapter meetings with our retired colleagues and Readers to encourage a sense of shared ministry and mutual support. When a benefice has a curate in-training we share opportunities for their development throughout the deanery.

We value tradition but also welcome new ideas at this time of rapid change, and we invite you to share your vision for the future, along with our own, so that we can recognise and welcome the presence of the Kingdom of God in our communities.

Wishing you grace and peace,

Helene Stainer (Area Dean)



The National Ploughing Championships were held in the Benefice last autumn.

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BENEFICE STATEMENT

Who we are:

- This is a mainly rural benefice of five parishes, on the edge of the Quantock hills;
- One parish is more populous than the others;
- Our parishes collaborate but have differing needs;
- Our churches have strong ties to the wider community;
- We have a wide range of worship traditions across our churches;
- We offer the challenge of rural ministry.

Our priorities:

- We seek someone with the patience and energy to support the whole people of the Benefice, and inspire people of all ages to know God and to grow in faith;
- To see our numbers increase;
- To rebuild and strengthen links with our schools;
- To develop more collaborative working across all five churches;
- To encourage the personal and vocational development of all our ministry team;
- To enable the Rector to flourish alongside the people in a good work/life balance.

We offer:

- An environment where worship comes naturally, with buildings soaked in centuries of prayer and praise, from BCP to Celtic;
- Links with schools, village agents and parish councils;
- [St Mary's Church Centre Bishops Lydeard](#) is an excellent venue for events and has a well-equipped parish office;
- Our churches are generally in a good state of repair;
- Buildings are normally left open during daylight hours;
- Visitors frequently comment on the warmth of the welcome offered in our churches;
- We have a number of organists available to cover services;
- The village of Bishops Lydeard has exceptional local facilities, and the County Town of Taunton is easily accessible by car or bus;
- The Benefice is within a designated National Landscape [formerly Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty].

At almost 23 miles in length, The West Somerset Railway is the longest heritage line in the United Kingdom.



Photo: Tom Adams for WRSA. Used by kind permission

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PUTTING OUR PARISHES AND COMMUNITIES INTO CONTEXT

Thoughts from the Discernment Day

WHAT IS GOOD

Beautiful buildings – sermons in stone
Churches are open daily
People look after each other
Parishes join with community for festivals
Building works ongoing and funded
Parishes building teamwork
Looking out to community

WHAT IS CHALLENGING

Resources: ‘ageing’, money, leadership
Geography – location of rural churches
Keeping people coming once started
Closer working within the Benefice
Attracting newcomers, especially children
Changing ‘social’ attitudes to church
Dealing with the DAC!

COMMUNITIES

New housing at Bishops Lydeard
Four parishes with small communities
and limited facilities
Individuals may not attend,
but value church tradition and contribute

HOPES

Better links with the land and farming
Collaborative ministry and teamwork
Bringing church and community closer
Church to be for everyone
To encourage young people
The Rector to be an active part of communities

OUR NEW RECTOR

The Benefice is looking someone with the experience and skill to offer:

- Good communication skills, to connect with all ages and to non-church communities;
- Leadership and a clear vision, but open to discussion;
- A listening ear;
- A friendly and approachable personality with a sense of humour;
- Fostering of discipleship and deepening of faith;
- Encouragement and support for lay ministry;
- A focus on the community;
- Visiting the housebound in isolated places;
- Rural empathy.

The Benefice will fund a part-time administrative post in support of the Rector, initially of four hours per week, working from the parish office in St Mary’s Church Centre in Bishops Lydeard. The exact job description will be agreed when an appointment has been made.

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SPOTLIGHTS

SCHOOLS

Our schools at [Bishops Lydeard](#) and [Lydeard St Lawrence](#), both in the Bath and Wells Academies Trust, will welcome the ministry of the new Rector. At Bishops Lydeard school services in the church for children and parents have resumed and one of the retired clergy has been actively working in the school. At Lydeard St Lawrence the new Head Teacher has said that she looks forward to having more contact with the Church. The Bible Society's "Open the Book" began but lapsed post-Covid.



ST MARY'S CHURCH CENTRE, BISHOPS LYDEARD

The centre's different rooms are used for activities, meetings and exhibitions, as well as for post-service coffee and chat, and visiting churches use the [Centre](#) as a base for awaydays. 'Souper' lunches are offered monthly, and the centre has been made available as a 'warm room', as well as a place of safety as designated by the parish council. Study groups for exploring Christianity are held here.



Lent lunches



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DURING THE VACANCY

During the vacancy the leadership of the parishes has come together in monthly meetings in discussion of matters both local and concerning the wider Church. Ideas for this Profile have come from parishioners from the whole Benefice, encouraged by a 'Discernment Day' arranged by staff from the Diocese. Lent Lunches in support of various charities were again run at St Mary's Church Centre Bishops Lydeard, hosted by each parish in turn. In the past mid-week services and house groups were well attended; a faith discussion group restarted in Lent this year and has continued. Services for the whole Benefice happen each month, and in May this is a Rogation Sunday event at a local farm. We would be happy to develop all-age services.

Services across the Benefice have maintained the pattern of Eucharistic ministry and the ministry of the Word through the commitment of two retired clergy, with occasional help from others, and of the lay people who lead worship: all the churchwardens, some of whom are authorised Lay Worship Assistants, and other lay people permitted to lead Morning Prayer in their own parishes. There are no Lay Readers licensed in the Benefice.

Services and other events are listed on websites and in *Fiveways*, the local magazine.

The tables on [page 16](#) show the present pattern of services and standard statistical data.



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THE PARISHES

Bishops Lydeard

The red sandstone church of St Mary the Virgin is beautiful. There has been a church here since Saxon times, but the oldest part of the present building dates from the end of the 13th century. If you would like to know about the history of the church, see bishopslydeardbenefice.org

You will find that we are a busy parish and that our times of worship are a focal point. What is harder to convey is the spirit of Christian love that exists. Like all churches, we are committed to loving each other and our community. We are actively trying to be a part of village events.

One person cannot do everything: we have a team of people who each contribute to keeping St Mary's running, from arranging flowers to church cleaning and from sidespersons to helping run Souper Lunches.

We have wonderful bells at St Mary's, but sadly we have been unable to ring them all for many months. This is due to a structural problem with a pinnacle on the tower and wider concerns about the strain that bell ringing is putting on the tower. We're working with the Diocesan Advisory Committee, our Structural Engineer and Architect to find a solution but it's taking a long time, and this has caused some frustration amongst our bellringers.

[St Mary's Church Centre Bishops Lydeard](#) was opened in June 1999. It was designed and built almost entirely by members of the church congregation and is a living example of faith in action. Our ethos is simple: to provide a warm, hospitable venue for everyone. It also contains the parish office.

We have close links with the Royal British Legion [Dunkirk Memorial House](#) (retirement home), which is situated at the edge of the village.



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Combe Florey

The church of St Peter and St Paul sits within the smallest of all the parishes within the Benefice and includes the hamlets of Nethercott, Trebles Holford and Seven Ash. The building is of rose-red sandstone and is Grade One listed – the first mention of a church at Combe Florey is 1292 when the patrons were the Prior and Convent of Taunton.

There are some notable literary and dramatic connections to the church. The Reverend Sidney Smith, Combe Florey's most well-known priest, lived in the Old Rectory from 1829–45, from where, as a writer and celebrated wit, he entertained eminent statesmen and famous literary figures of the day.

Evelyn Waugh and his wife, Laura, are buried in a grave adjoining the churchyard, just below Combe Florey House. It was here that Evelyn Waugh's best-known novel, *Brideshead Revisited*, was written. The Waugh family continued to live in the village until the early 2000s when Auberon Waugh died, and his wife moved to nearby Milverton.

Terence Rattigan also lived in the village with his parents during the early 1900s. In 2003 Michael MacIntyre, the comedian, married Kitty, the daughter of Simon Ward, the actor, in the church. (Now you know why his West Country accent is so good!)

The village has a convivial pub, *The Farmers Arms*, from which one can watch the steam trains cross the bridge over the main A358. It has a thriving village hall which provides a place for villagers who come together for celebratory social events and for various groups to meet, for example the Art Circle, the Stitchers, a Yoga group, a book mart and the W.I.

We can offer you a pretty church in the centre of the village, a kind-hearted and enthusiastic group of PCC members and a village keen to welcome a new incumbent and join with him/her in the events of the Christian calendar such as Christmas carols by the tree, Good Friday Prayers by the Cross, Harvest Festival supper and more.

People have been worshipping at the church in Combe Florey for a long time – please come and join us as we strive to keep our rural churches at the centre of village life.



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Cothelstone

Our parish of St Thomas of Canterbury, Cothelstone, lies on the southern slopes of the Quantock Hills and is the least populated within the benefice. The church forms a picturesque group with a holy well, manor house, farm, and a few cottages, with several other hamlets in the parish. Agriculture is the main occupation, and the church is the only public building, being the nearest thing to a social centre. The church dates from the 12th century, comprising chancel, nave, tower and south aisle, and contains good table and wall memorials and some medieval and Jacobean woodwork. Many people comment on its peaceful and spiritual atmosphere. A substantial amount of work was carried out on the roof and electrical system some twenty years ago, and the church is in good external order. Some ten years ago a new vestry area and ringing platform were built. We have recently completed some work on our organ. The most recent Quinquennial Survey and Electrical Inspection were in 2022 and 2023 respectively, no immediate issues arising from either.

Our church holds a service every Sunday morning, alternating Holy Communion and Mattins, with a joint service held somewhere within the benefice on every fifth Sunday. Our patronal festival is on 29th December. We use the 1662 Book of Common Prayer and the King James Bible, which we greatly enjoy both for the beauty of the language and for the sense that we are the latest in a long unbroken tradition. This attracts over half the congregation, who come from outside the parish. We have a comprehensive set of eucharistic vestments and are corporate members of the Prayer Book Society. We sing enthusiastically during our traditional yet relaxed services (fortunately, we have a regular organist) We like to think we are a welcoming group to all parishioners and visitors, whether of the faith or not.



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Lydeard St Lawrence

The village of Lydeard St Lawrence includes the hamlets of Westowe, Pyleigh, Chapel Leigh, Westleigh and part of Nethercott. The village has a population of approximately 500 and is ten miles north-west of the County Town of Taunton, lying between the Quantock Hills and the Brendon Hills, in an area of outstanding beauty.

St Lawrence the Martyr is a Grade 1 medieval church, with some parts dating to Saxon times. The history of the church can be found on the Lydeard St Lawrence website. At the last Quinquennial only minor faults were found. The church is open during daylight hours.

The congregation is a small, ageing but enthusiastic and friendly group of people who put on fund-raising activities each year: a Harvest Supper, a Fete most years, cream tea and croquet afternoon and an abseil down the tower this year.

A project group has been set up to oversee a planned reorganisation of the church facilities, to bring us into the 21st century. These plans are DAC-approved, to take water into church, remove pews, include a servery, toilets and meeting area. Medieval pew ends will be relocated within the building. The dais and water have been put in.

People in the village are always willing to help with these activities, and other jobs that have to be undertaken around the church.

[Lydeard St Lawrence Community Primary School](#) is in the Bath & Wells Academy Trust and uses the church each term.



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West Bagborough

The church of St Pancras was built in the 15th Century and extended and refurbished in 1872. Between the Wars the building was redecorated to the designs of Sir Ninian Comper. It has six bells with a small group of keen bellringers. The church is located on two named footpaths which pass through the churchyard, though pedestrian access from the road is up a steep path. The Visitors' Book is well filled with appreciative comments.

Services take place every Sunday, with Morning Prayer (BCP and CW) alternating with Holy Communion (Order One, traditional language). For over a century there has been a tradition of Anglo-Catholic worship: though much has changed, vestments and incense are preferred at the Eucharist; votive candles burn in front of Our Lady. At Christmas, Midnight Mass is well attended; the candlelit carol service is very popular with villagers, both adults and children. Good Friday is observed with Stations of the Cross.

The village population comprises young working families or older retired professionals. Occupations include farming, and some residents commute to Taunton or Bridgwater. The Popham Hall is in constant and varied use, including for coffee mornings and a community choir; the village holds a summer fete and flower show, and the cricket club is very active.

The church congregation is tiny, but active and committed to keeping the building in good order, though roof repairs will soon be needed, and to maintaining weekly worship on behalf of the village. Many inhabitants are supportive, even if they do not often attend; they still want the rituals of the Church when they need them, for baptisms, marriages and funerals. We would like to work with the Rector to reach out to such people.



'Its beautiful situation on the slopes of the Quantock hills, with a widely spreading view over the valley, give it a certain distinction. It has kept its simple character as a village church.'
– Father John Briscoe, Rector 1904–1939.

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SERVICES IN A TYPICAL MONTH

	St Mary, Bishops Lydeard	St Lawrence, Lydeard St Lawrence	St Peter and St Paul, Combe Florey	St Pancras, W Bagborough	St Thomas of Canterbury, Cothelstone
1st Sunday	9.30am Sung Eucharist (CW)	11.15am Morning Prayer (CW)		11.15am Mattins	11.15 am Holy Communion (BCP)
2nd Sunday	9.30am Morning Prayer (CW)		9.30am Holy Communion (CW)	11.15am Holy Communion (CW, traditional language)	11.15am Mattins
3rd Sunday	9.30am Sung Eucharist (CW)	11.15am Holy Communion (CW)		11.15am Morning Prayer (CW)	11.15am Holy Communion (BCP)
4th Sunday	9.30am Informal Service or All Age Eucharist.		9.30am Morning Prayer (CW)	11.15am Holy Communion (CW, traditional language)	11.15am Mattins
Benefice Evensong is held in a different church each fourth Sunday: 4pm from October to March, 6pm from April to September.					
5th Sunday	9.30am Morning Prayer (CW)				
10.30am Benefice Eucharist is held in a different church each fifth Sunday.					

DASHBOARD DATA

	Bishops Lydeard	Lydeard St Lawrence	Combe Florey	West Bagborough	Cothelstone
Population	2924	411	239	440	107
Deprivation Ranking *	7430	4510	4510	4510	10978
Electoral Roll 2023	62	24	24	25	18
Average attendance	35	5	8	7	11
Easter attendance	55	22	8	17	18

* 1=most deprived parish in the Church of England, 12,239=least deprived.

In 2023 four of the five parishes paid their Parish Share assessment in full. A proposed change to Common Fund methodology could place significant demands on the parishes.

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YOUR HOME – description of the Rectory

Situated in the centre of Bishops Lydeard, the Rectory was built in the 1960s and has five bedrooms, a sunny living room, study, dining room, kitchen, utility room, upstairs bathroom and downstairs WC. Two of the bedrooms have washbasins.

The enclosed garden has an informal but well cared for feel to it. A combination of grass, shrubs, flowers and a pond make for a relaxing space that is not overlooked. The front of the Rectory has its own large parking area, as well as a garage.

There is a path across the churchyard to the south door of the church. Vehicle access is via a drive from the main road through the village. One neighbour is the Bishops Lydeard Co-Op, and a former incumbent observed that he carried out much of his ministry in the aisles of this always busy local store!

The Rectory has been fully refurbished during the vacancy. The main picture is of the Rectory, as seen from the top of the church tower.



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THE AREA

Bishop's Lydeard has a good range of local amenities: a primary school, two pubs, shops, a village hall, health centre, dentist, vet, newsagent, tearoom, Chinese takeaway, and garage. The village has a football club with active youth teams, a cricket club, as well as other sports such as snooker and short mat bowls, which take place in the village hall. The village hall is well appointed and well used by exercise groups, a variety of social clubs, and the parish council meets at the hall. There are active Scouts and Brownies groups.

There is some wonderful walking to be done from the village, or in the Quantock Hills National Landscape. Riding is also available. There are local point-to-point meetings, and the annual Quantock show takes place at Cothelstone. A bus service runs between Minehead and Taunton.

Further afield

Taunton is the County Town and the nearest main shopping centre. It has plenty of schools, both state and private. Taunton railway station provides fast direct links to Bristol, London, Exeter, Plymouth and Penzance (FGW), as well as CrossCountry trains to Birmingham and Edinburgh.

Exeter is some 38 miles to the south-west, whilst Bristol is some 50 miles to the north. Both have international airports.

The seaside towns of Watchet and Minehead are easily reached by road via the A358 or by the West Somerset Railway from Bishops Lydeard Station.

Attractions

The Exmoor Society – exmoorsociety.com

Brewhouse Theatre – tauntonbrewhouse.co.uk

West Somerset Railway – west-somerset-railway.co.uk

Things to do in Somerset – visitsomerset.co.uk

Arts, Culture and Outdoors – Somerset Council

Somerset County Cricket Club – Somersetcountycc.co.uk

Museum of Somerset – swheritage.org.uk/museum-of-somerset

Hestercombe House – <https://www.hestercombe.com>

Willows and Wetlands Centre – <https://www.coatesenglishwillow.co.uk>



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CONTACTS AND LINKS

For any enquiries regarding the vacancy:

Alison Cruickshank,
Taunton Archdeaconry Assistant
T: 01749 588906
E: alison.cruickshank@bathwells.anglican.org

Diocese: bathandwells.org.uk/

Benefice website: bishopslydeardbenefice.org/

All of the parishes in the benefice have entries on *A Church Near You* .

School websites: bishopslydeardbwmat.org
lydeardstlawrenceprimary.co.uk

Village websites: bishopslydeard.org.uk
westbagboroughparish.uk
lydeard-st-l.co.uk
combefloreyvh.wordpress.com

The Benefice ...



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