

# West Dartmoor Benefice

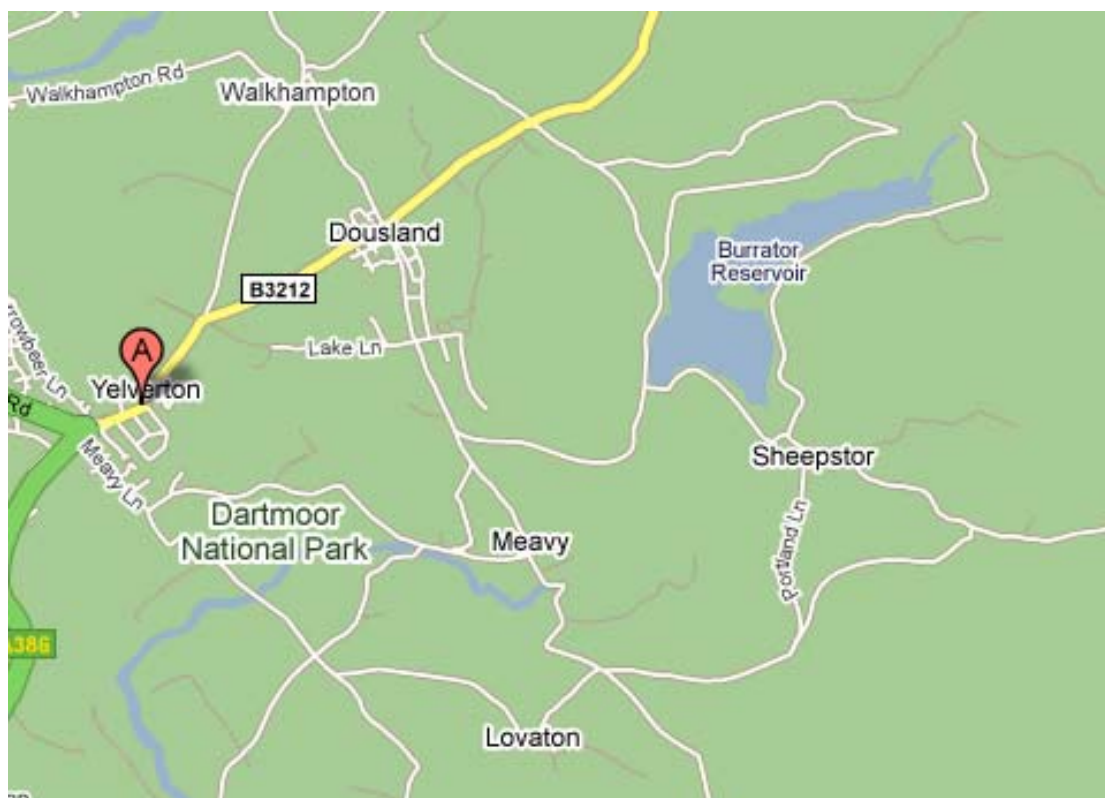
## Benefice Profile



St Peter's, Meavy  
St Leonard's, Sheepstor  
St Mary's, Walkhampton  
St Paul's, Yelverton



The West Dartmoor Benefice is situated in Dartmoor National Park, some 10 miles from Plymouth, 6 miles from Tavistock, and 5 miles from Princetown.



## CONTEXT

The Benefice consists of four largely rural parishes offering an interesting social mix made up of large detached residences, small housing estates and some social housing (8 are currently being built in Walkhampton), set within the National Park and in an area of traditional upland farming. The main pull is towards Plymouth in terms of employment although as part of the Tavistock Deanery many are drawn towards the expanding market town of Tavistock but the Benefice also includes working farms and associated concerns. The area has a large number of families with children, and people of working age. It also has a population of retired people, most very active. While it does not have significant areas of deprivation the income levels of many in the community, particularly those working on the land, are very low.

The Benefice straddles two Civil Parishes: Burrator Civil Parish includes Meavy, Walkhampton, Dousland and Sheepstor (population circa 1,550). Yelverton is part of Buckland Monachorum Civil parish (Yelverton's population circa 1600).

Of the four parishes, three are based on traditional Dartmoor villages and the fourth developed in the C20th to cater for a community developing on the edge of the moor, initially stimulated by railway access to Plymouth. The four parishes came together in a single benefice in 1987, initially retaining a considerable separateness of identity. In the recent past the Parishes, while recognising the good quality of much work done at local parish level where there are loyal followings, have wanted to develop a stronger Christian Outreach and Mission at Benefice level focussed on growing the Church beyond its traditional membership. They have created a voluntary Benefice Council to take forward the group level of work and are exploring with the Diocese the formal legal establishment of this as a Joint PCC whilst retaining individual parish PCCs as legal

entities. The Benefice is keen to find a new Priest to share and help lead this Mission and this journey of Growth.

*The West Dartmoor Benefice* was the new designation given to this group of parishes in 2008 following the resignation of the Rector at which time the living was suspended and Revd Nick Shutt was appointed as a non-stipendiary priest in charge by the Bishop of Plymouth for a period of 12 months. This was done to give the parishes time to reflect on the way forward for them as a grouping and to find additional new ways to collaborate together. This collaboration must also be seen against the background of wider moves across the Deanery to form Mission Communities to rationalise resources.

In 2009, the Benefice has started looking after the neighbouring parish of Princetown as part of the process of formation of a Mission Community. This currently informal arrangement will be codified in due course but involves a change of Deanery for Princetown and Methodist ecumenical partners as the church meets in the Methodist Church, the Anglican Church having been closed and transferred to the Churches Conservation Trust some years ago. Collaboration has also started with the adjoining parishes of Horrbridge and Sampford Spiney and across the denominations with Methodist Colleagues.

## **CHURCHES AND THEIR COMMUNITIES**

Each church in the Benefice has one main service each week. In addition, St Paul's Yelverton also has an 8 a.m. Service and a Sung BCP Evensong, both once a month. Part of the work of the Benefice Council has been to rationalise the range of services offered and this has been broadly welcomed.

St Peter's church, **Meavy** is situated in the heart of the village, next to the Village Green. It has no church hall, but makes use of the village hall. It has an average Sunday congregation of around 35. The service pattern is a mix of Order 1, an informal Service of the Word as a family service and Order 2 (once a month). The parish paid its Diocesan Share in full in 2008. Building: Grade 1 Listed mainly 13<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> century (with associations with Francis Drake). Work is just being completed to re-point the tower at a cost of just under £10,000. Liturgical Dress is Cassock & Surplice or Cassock Alb & Stole. Churchmanship is central, welcoming rural Anglican. While the village has no shop or Post Office it has a historic pub, owned by the Civil Parish Council and runs a traditional annual Fayre. The village also has a thriving gardening society and a newly revived amateur dramatic society. The local pre-school meets in the village hall from Monday to Thursday and a Mums and Toddlers group meets there on Fridays.

St Mary's Church, **Walkhampton** is situated half a mile outside the village of Walkhampton on top of a hill (no one knows why for sure). The service pattern is Order 1 and an informal Service of the Word once a month as a family service. The Sunday congregation numbers around 30-35. The parish paid its Diocesan Share in full in 2008. Building: Grade 1 Listed. A project to develop the west end of the church to install a toilet and kitchen facilities is in the advanced stage of being planned and for which substantial funds have already been raised. The Bells have recently been re-hung at a cost of £10,000. Liturgical Dress is Cassock Alb, Stole & Chasuble. Churchmanship is central, welcoming rural Anglican. It had a history of being a high church but this is no longer true. The village has a popular pub, two social housing developments under development (15 units) and while it has lost its shop/ post office has a wide range of social events

including a strong gardening society. The church often hosts the Saturday Village Market when the Village Hall is unavailable. Services are occasionally held in the Village Hall and in particular the annual Service of Remembrance which attracts 120+. The Village Hall also has a large playing field used for football and cricket.

**Sheepstor** is a small village (45 adults) with a village hall. St Leonard's Church congregation is small but very committed and is not afraid to consider liturgical change and to experiment with themed services and special events ("Come & Sing"; Taize; Outside Speakers from Local Agencies etc). The service pattern is the most traditional of all the parishes concentrating on Order 2, Evening Prayer, and a more modern form of the Service of the Word. The average number attending services is 9 but for special events the church is full. The parish paid its Diocesan Share in full in 2008. Building: Grade 1 Listed (with associations with the Brooke Family – the Rajahs of Sarawak). Liturgical Dress is Cassock & Surplice or Cassock Alb & Stole. Churchmanship is central, welcoming rural Anglican.

**Yelverton** is the largest single settlement and has a good mix of shops and services (GP's Surgery, Garages, Co-op, Butchers, Post Office, General Stores, Pubs, Estate Agents, ice cream parlour, café, take away outlets and restaurants etc). It also has a fairly new community hall, and separate play park and good public transport links to Plymouth and Tavistock. There is a number of Nursing and Residential Homes situated around Yelverton. Communion is taken on a monthly basis to 2 Residential Homes and a small complex of Sheltered Housing. The Church Hall, built in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, used to be the original church building until replaced by the current church. The Church Hall is widely used by the local community.. The service pattern is a mix of Order 1, Order 2, and Service of the Word as a Family Service. The average attendance is around 40. There is a mid-week communion service every week. There is a small church choir (only about 5-8 singers). The Church Tower has recently been part rendered to prevent water ingress at a cost of nearly £100,000. The church is in good repair and condition. The parish paid its Diocesan Share in full in 2008. Building: Grade 2 Listed. Liturgical Dress is Cassock Alb, Stole & Chasuble and cassock & surplice. Churchmanship is central, welcoming rural Anglican but perhaps more formal than the other parishes. There are ecumenical links with both the Methodist and Catholic Churches (Unity Service at Pentecost and Shared Harvest Suppers are examples). The Rectory is situated behind the church building. It is a large detached early C20th house with substantial gardens.



Dousland is a district of C20th development of detached housing roughly in the centre of the Benefice which while the second largest settlement in the benefice has little community focus beyond the pub and Post Office/Stores. There is a home for adults with learning difficulties. There is a modern Vicarage in Dousland which has been let for many years as the Benefice has not enjoyed the services of a Team Vicar since 1998.

The current service pattern includes a Benefice Service when there is a 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in the month and the venue rotates around the Benefice.

Full details of the life of the Benefice in 2008 can be found in the online annual report at [www.westdartmoorbeneice.co.uk](http://www.westdartmoorbeneice.co.uk)

## **SCHOOLS**

The villages of Walkhampton and Meavy both have Church Schools (about 100 on the roll of each) which are very popular locally and manly feed into Tavistock Community College. This Local Community College at Tavistock currently enjoys the work of a Youth Worker Funded by a local charity, Catalyst Tavistock. A number of children from the Benefice also attend Plymouth schools.

The 2 Church Primary Schools are supported by active membership of the Governing Bodies by the Priest in Charge (and other ministers and congregation members) and the provision of services throughout the year and weekly input into assemblies.

In addition, there is a County Primary School at Princetown where links are being established.

## **STAFFING**

Subject to the concurrence of the newly appointed priest in charge and the agreement of the Bishop of Plymouth, the current NSM Priest in Charge, Revd Nick Shutt plans to continue to minister in the Benefice once a successor has been appointed in some capacity but the details of that continuing role would need to be agreed with the new priest in charge.

In addition, there is one licensed Reader who is able to take funerals.

There is a number of retired ministers with permission to officiate. They have been an invaluable resource and without them the current service pattern would not have been sustained. (Revd John Weir, Revd Peggy Salmon, Revd Jill Locock, Mr Roger Locock (Reader)). All things being equal they are keen to continue to be involved in the life and ministry of the Benefice. A good team spirit has been generated through regular meetings of Ministers for business, pastoral concerns, duty rotas, and mutual support.

Benefice Expenses are met in full and claimed on a monthly basis via the Benefice Treasurer. (Travel, phone, out of pockets etc).

Fees are assigned. These are collated in a separate Fee Account and dealt with by a retired church treasurer.

Whilst each parish has an exemplary record of paying Diocesan Share it is true to say that this year (2009) there has been pressure on finances. A combination of some congregation shrinkage, general economic gloom and continuing upward price inflation in the demands made by insurers and the Diocese have meant that one church (St Paul's) had to dip into reserves to balance the books in 2008. They are actively looking at a stewardship campaign but within the wider context of church growth. St Peter's conducted a stewardship campaign in 2008 which increased giving dramatically.

## **PASTORAL VISITORS**

A Team of Pastoral Visitors has been set up. They meet monthly with the Priest in Charge for sharing, training, and encouragement. Training on bereavement has been undertaken in 2009. The Team undertakes a great deal of pastoral visiting with leads being fed in from funerals etc.

## **WORSHIP TEAMS**

Each Parish has set up a Worship Team who, in liaison with the Ministers sets about arranging the informal service of the word each month. Each parish is developing its own style of doing this.

All parishes have rotas for lesson reading, welcomers, and leading intercessions.

## **PARISH ORGANIZATIONS & COMMUNICATIONS**

A website (details on front cover) was designed in 2008. A number of people have been trained to enable them to update this on a regular basis across the parishes.

Full details are available in the latest Annual Report at [www.westdartmoorbenefice.co.uk](http://www.westdartmoorbenefice.co.uk) and the report of the Priest in Charge concerning the process leading to the proposed new appointment.

The Benefice has no employees but serious consideration is being given to paid administrative support for the new Priest in Charge when in post.

A weekly bulletin is produced by a group of volunteers and a Monthly Church and Community Magazine *Roundabout* has a large circulation across the parishes and offers a mix of church and community news and events (including the Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches in Yelverton).

A Benefice-wide Choir meets informally throughout the year for larger services at Easter, Pentecost, Harvest and Christmas. This choir can number 30-40 and people are happy to commit for 3 or 4 practices in advance of services and to reform when required.

Ad hoc Quiet Days take place, as do Lent Groups. The Mothers Union and small prayer groups at Yelverton and Meavy meet regularly. The church is involved with Mothers and Toddlers Groups at Meavy and Yelverton.

There are social events throughout the year: Skittles, parish walks, informal gatherings for lunch after services (Pentecost 09), coffee after family services and fund raising events, many of which are reported in the Annual Report.

## **BENEFICE COUNCIL AIMS AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2009.**

The Benefice Council, at a quiet day in 2008 planned certain aims and objectives for the Benefice. These will be reviewed towards the end of 2009 but they are set out as follows:

- **Working together:** *Strong West Dartmoor Benefice Brand. Worshipping together. Fewer Services/ More shared. Links to other Christians.*
- **Managing Change/ Breaking the Mould:** *Real engagement with Diocese. Becoming a beacon for the Diocese. Every Member ministry. Less dependent on "clergy". "Wind up" Laity. Well managed change, explained and justified. Further changes of leadership well handled in 2009. Willing to try. Sensitive to wider culture. Less "Church Building" focussed. Financial problems solved.*
- **Outreach/ Growth:** *Getting "out", physically and mentally. Seeking new members. Filling the church with crowds. As a result of identifying these three themes, Four Priority Plans have been put forward:*
  - **Youth:** *Knowing more people. Catering for children on their own, not forcing them into traditional/ adult worship patterns. Links with schools.*
  - **Worship Planning:** *Delivering on working together, worshipping together, every member Ministry, breaking the mould and linking to other Christians.*
  - **Pastoral :** *Developing a pastoral church, good pastoral process*
  - **Social:** *More activity, events*

The Benefice is looking for a person to carry forward the work that is already on-going to build upon the work of the last 12 months in moving the Benefice forward.

## **Policies**

The Benefice welcomes children and adults for baptism seeking to build on contacts with parents of young children. Preparation is ad hoc as the need arises and Baptisms take place within the main Sunday Services.

With regard to marriage, the policy of the Benefice to date has been to offer a service of Blessing rather than marriage to those who have been married before.

The benefice has an approach of warm welcome to women in the priesthood.

## **Skills & Gifts**

The priest in charge must have the ability to work as a team player, to build on the work already being undertaken across the Benefice, and have the vision to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a dynamic and vibrant way to those in this beautiful part of West Devon who are not yet members of the Church as well as those who are.