

Amesbury Parish Church
The Abbey Church of Saint Mary & Saint Melor



We seek a new priest, committed to Eucharistic liturgical worship and the Anglican Choral Tradition, for an interim ministry of three years, hopefully renewable for a further similar term.

The Parish of Amesbury seeks a new Priest-in-Charge...

The parish of Amesbury in Wiltshire is seeking a new Priest-in-Charge. The Abbey Church of St. Mary and St. Melor is the town's only parish church and was originally founded as a Benedictine monastic community in the tenth century.

The parish includes much of the fast-expanding town as well as surrounding countryside and the historic monument of Stonehenge. Our Sunday worship is Eucharistic with clergy in vestments, and has a long-standing choral tradition. Amesbury's ecclesiology is of the modern Catholic tradition, inclusive of welcoming the whole community that we serve.

The Vicar we seek

We have been through a difficult few years dogged by building issues and some challenging interactions within the church family. We seek a welcoming and warm-hearted pastor who will bring healing and reconciliation. The church's modern catholic worship tradition is much-valued and so we seek a priest for whom the Eucharist, liturgical worship, and the Anglican choral tradition are of great importance. We also need someone who relishes a challenge and can help us cast a new vision for the future and think laterally about how to tackle our building and financial issues. Finally we seek a priest with the ability both to convey the Word of God but also to be a good listener – someone who will befriend the people of Amesbury and make Jesus known in our parish.

The church as a worshipping community

We do our best to be a warm-hearted, loyal Christian community committed to the Faith. There are around 90 parishioners on the electoral roll and average Sunday attendance is 50. There is an active community of parishioners, including welcomers, weekday stewards, servers, choir members (adults and children), bellringers, flower arrangers, coffee-makers, and dusters and polishers. Quarterly informal parish planning meetings are held in a nearby inn and everyone is welcome to take part.

The parish benefits from the services of an experienced Lay Worship Leader. This has also enabled us to have Sunday evening worship, including Evening Prayer (BCP), and Compline.

Parishioners do their best to witness to the Faith in their everyday lives in the local community. We are working to expand our team of parishioners who are well-placed to contribute actively to the life and work of the Church. At present we are without a team of Lay Pastoral Assistants although potentially there are parishioners capable of undertaking this and other roles after a suitable period of training - so we look forward to recruiting and nurturing a team of Lay Pastoral Assistants and more Lay Worship Leaders to support the incumbent in the parish's ministry to the town.

The choir and bell ringers

Amesbury Abbey has a robed choir of adults and children. It has a long history and is much valued by the parishioners. Currently the direction of the choir is in the care of a voluntary organist who has been a chorister here since childhood. It is the PCC's wish to be able to recruit a professional Director of Music when funding permits. See Appendix 3

Both the choir and the bell-ringing team (see Appendix 4) work hard at their respective contributions to the life of the church and the Vicar's role in encouraging and nurturing both will be very important. Periodic meetings with the Director of Music and the Bell Captain are highly valued and enable both groups to maximise their potential.

The church building

Pevsner describes the church of St. Mary and St. Melor as 'mostly of flint, cruciform, and on a grand scale'.¹ In recent years major restoration work has been undertaken on the nave and tower roofs. It is an important building of architectural and historical interest and features in many books.² The Friends of Amesbury Abbey Church contribute financially towards the cost of repairs to the fabric and the group has organised an annual programme of fund-raising and social events since the 1980s. With more people we can increase the parish's income to ensure the future of the building as a sacred space and centre of the Anglican Christian community in Amesbury as well as to contribute suitably to the diocesan parish share.

The church's resources

At present the church building lacks a meeting room, office, kitchen and toilet facilities. There is a need, too, for a new and effective heating system. The PCC has already dedicated significant effort and expenditure on its 'Fit-for-the-Future' project that aims to address these practical shortcomings. A survey of people's views and opinions has been undertaken and conceptual drawings have been created by the parish's architect. The new priest will be well-placed to lead the further work required to secure grant-funding, additional fund-raising and building work to realise the parish's vision for the abbey church supported by experienced volunteers including a prospective project manager.

Governance

The parish is part of the Stonehenge Deanery and is in the care of the suffragan Bishop of Ramsbury in the Salisbury Diocese. Amesbury has an eight-strong and hard-working Parochial Church Council that meets monthly in church.

¹ Julian Orbach, Nikolaus Pevsner and Bridget Cherry. *The Buildings of England: Wiltshire*. Yale, New Haven and London, 2021, pp 108-110.

² Simon Jenkins, *England's Thousand Best Churches*, Allen Lane/Penguin, London 1999, page 721, also John Betjeman and updated by Richard Surman, *Betjeman's Best British Churches*, Collins, London, 2011, page 698. *Churches of South-East Wiltshire*; Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England; London, HMSO, 1987.

Transport links

Amesbury is an hour and a half's drive from London via the M3 and A303. The nearest railway stations are Andover (10 miles away) and Salisbury (9 miles). Salisbury has frequent direct railway connections to London Waterloo, Southampton and Portsmouth, Bath, Bristol, and Cardiff, and Exeter. Frequent buses run between Salisbury Market Place and Amesbury (X4, X5, and activ8). The active8 bus operates between Salisbury, Amesbury and Andover, and calls at Andover railway station.

Schools

There is a church-aided primary School, Amesbury CE Primary School, now part of an academy trust, and three others, and Stonehenge Comprehensive School. Bishop Wordsworth School and South Wilts Grammar School are a 25-minute bus journey away in Salisbury.

Local shopping

For food shopping there is a large Tesco superstore, and branches of Aldi and the Co-op. For household items B&M and Home Bargains have large stores. There are many individual shops, restaurants and other local businesses in the town centre. Salisbury is less than 15 minutes by car and is the major shopping centre for south Wiltshire.

Overnight accommodation

Both Travelodge and Holiday Inn have hotels in Amesbury. In the town centre is the historic George Hotel, an old coaching inn.

Leisure Opportunities

Durrington Swimming and Fitness Centre is nearby and there is a wide range of sports clubs including cricket, football, and bowls in the town. There is a wide variety of arts organisations and venues, including the Salisbury Playhouse Theatre, Salisbury Arts Centre and others in Amesbury and the surrounding villages co-ordinated by the charity Wiltshire Rural Music.

Churches in Amesbury

The parish has friendly relations with the local Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, and Grace Churches.

The Vicarage

The Vicarage is adjacent to the church, purpose-built in the 1980s in the back garden of the much larger, former Vicarage.



In summary, we offer:

- A welcoming, loyal Christian community committed to the Faith.
- A diligent and active Parochial Church Council.
- One church building, of significant architectural and historical interest.
- A team of welcomers, weekday stewards who keep the church open, a serving team, large choir that includes both adults and children, bellringers, flower arrangers, and dusters and polishers.
- A well-supported Parish Planning Meeting, convened quarterly and meeting in the nearby George Hotel.
- An established quarterly Liturgy Planning Meeting.
- Good potential for a supportive Lay Pastoral Ministry Team
- An experienced Lay Worship Leader
- A well-appointed Vicarage adjacent to the churchyard.
- A supportive Bishop, Archdeacon, Rural Dean and Deanery Synod

Appendix 1

Key moments in the history of Amesbury Abbey Church

979AD Foundation of the Benedictine Abbey of St. Mary, later also dedicated to St. Melor.

1177 Dissolution of the abbey, the church of St. Mary and St. Melor granted to Amesbury Priory.

New priory church built by 1186; the church of St. Mary and St. Melor remained in use as the parish church.

Eleanor of Provence, Queen Consort of King Henry III, took the veil at Amesbury Priory and lived the rest of her life until her death in 1291.

The right to appoint chaplains, later curates, to the parish church exercised by Amesbury Priory until its dissolution in 1539, and by St. George's Chapel, Windsor from 1630.

1539 Dissolution of Amesbury Priory.

1852-3 Restoration of the church by William Butterfield.

1868 Under the Incumbents Act of that year the living became a Vicarage in the gift of St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

1905 Structural restoration by C.E. Ponting and Detmar Blow.

1905 Bells rehung and increased to eight.

1907 Quire Screen restored.

Appendix 2

Liturgy and Worship at Amesbury Parish Church 2024

A. General Pattern

Sung Eucharist on Sunday mornings at 10.0am. Common Worship Order One

Separate Orders for:

Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter Day, Ascension Day, All Age Eucharist.

All Age Eucharist: customarily (*but not exclusively*) on the first Sunday of the month.
Sung Eucharist (*on all other Sundays*)

Compline (during Holy Week and on other occasions. (sung).

Holy Communion (BCP) Sunday at 8.00am, Wednesdays at 11.00am.

Evening Service Monthly; Evening Prayer (Common Worship), Evening Prayer (BCP),
Compline.

Evensong (sung) on occasions (choir).

B. Special Services

Advent Carol Service at 6.00pm on Advent Sunday (*readers from Churches in Amesbury*).

Christmas Carol Service, 6.00pm, (*usually on the Fourth Sunday of Advent*).

Crib Service (*a few days before Christmas*) 4.00pm.

Midnight Mass 11.30pm.

Christmas morning Eucharist (*said, with carols*)

Epiphany: procession of the three kings at the start of the Eucharist. (*children*)

Candlemas/Presentation: ceremony of 'turning towards the Cross' (*removal of crib, replacement with the cross*)

Ash Wednesday: Sung Eucharist 7.30pm in the Quire.

Mothering Sunday All Age Eucharist

Stations of the Cross (*Saturday morning before Palm Sunday*)

Palm Sunday; Liturgy and Procession of the Palms, Eucharist of Palm Sunday, including Passion Gospel.

Monday in Holy Week: **Compline**, sung, in the Quire)

Maundy Thursday Liturgy (Quire) including Ceremony of Footwashing, Procession to the Altar of Repose and Vigil (Jesus Chapel).

Good Friday Liturgy 2.00pm

including Reproaches, Passion Gospel.

Holy Saturday

Easter Vigil, Service of Light, Renewal of Baptismal Vows,

Easter Sunday

The Eucharist of Easter Day.

Ascension Day Sung Eucharist (Quire) 7.30pm.

Pentecost Sunday

Procession and Sung Eucharist.

Trinity Sunday

Sung Eucharist

Corpus Christi

Sung Eucharist 7.30pm (Quire)

Patronal Festival (*Blessed Virgin Mary, and Saint Mellor*)

Sung Eucharist on the Second Sunday of September.

Harvest Festival

Sung Eucharist on the first Sunday in October

Sung Evensong for Harvest Festival on the same day.

All Saints

Sung Eucharist on the nearest Sunday at 10.00am

All Souls

Non-eucharistic service in the afternoon of the All Saints Sunday, followed by tea.

Remembrance

Royal British Legion Service of Remembrance, War Memorial in the churchyard, 10.45, followed by shortened (*said*) Eucharist with hymns at 11.30am.

Appendix 3

The Acting Director of Music writes:

Amesbury Parish Church has a long-standing choral tradition with a voluntary choir to lead the singing and enhance the worship. Photographs and sheet music indicate the existence of a choir of 30 or more members in the late 19th century and this tradition has been maintained over the

years. For many years it was an all-male choir, with girls and women being invited to join in the 1980s.

Membership numbers have fluctuated over the years, and the present strength of the choir is 20, of which 5 are youth members. The choir has always sung 4-part music, though as with other parish choirs it has become difficult to maintain all four parts and we currently have no tenor line. Most music is therefore accompanied on the organ, with unaccompanied singing not practical. We have a wide repertoire of music from the English choral tradition, ranging from plainsong and music by the Tudor composers, the Victorians and the modern musicians.

Our main purpose is to lead the singing at the Parish Eucharist Service, and to sing an anthem during the communion. At the All-Age Eucharist Service we lead in a more informal way, with some members in the stalls, and others sitting among the congregation. We lead the singing at midweek Sung Eucharist services, and at the main festivals. The choir is available on request to sing for funeral and wedding services, for which a charge is made. Choir practice takes place on Thursday evenings from 7.00-8.00pm in the Jesus Chapel.

For many years the choir led the services from choir stalls, in the crossing, two stalls on each side inward facing, at a time when the organ was situated at the entrance to the Jesus Chapel. It needed replacement in the 1980s and the church acquired the organ from the redundant church of St Edmund, in Salisbury in 1983. It had to be placed at the west end of the church, and because accompaniment of the choir situated in the crossing proved impractical, the choir stalls also were moved to the west end, initially facing inwards. Increasing membership necessitated more stalls, and the present arrangement was adopted with the choir facing eastwards.

The 'Fit for the Future' project allows for complete reorganisation of the church, and the proposal will be for the choir stalls to be replaced with chairs, facing inwards, which will enable members to see those opposite, and will provide visual communication with the organist. The organ is a fine 3-manual instrument with a full pedalboard. It dates from 1777, with much modification over the years. Advice from the organ builder is that it requires a full restoration, which will cost at least £20,000. This will need to wait until the interior of the church is refurbished, and can perhaps be done at the same time.

Members of the Youth Choir are paid, by the PCC, for attendance at practices and services. This is administered by the Choir Treasurer, who also looks after the Choir Fund. The main source of income for the fund is the charge for attendance at weddings and funerals and memorial services. Youth Choir members are paid for these services, and the residue placed in the fund, either the general fund or the social fund. The former is used mainly for sheet music purchase, the latter for events such as the Youth Choir visit to the pantomime at Christmas.

The loyalty of choir members enables us to maintain our tradition, and there is a willingness and eagerness to ensure that this aspect of our church life continues for future generations.

Appendix

Bell Ringing at St. Mary & St. Melor, Amesbury

There are 8 bells, with the tenor weighing just over 18cwt (approx. 900kg) in D. They are well maintained and were rehung in a new metal frame in 1999.

Access to the large Ringing Room, situated directly over the Crossing, is via a spiral staircase of 48 (rather uneven steps). The entrance to the staircase is in the Church.

Currently, there is a band of 5 ringers. Three have been ringing for many years and two have been learning for 1-2 years. Unfortunately, this is too small a band to guarantee Service ringing every week but every effort is made to ring for major festivals. Ringers from other local churches and across the Salisbury Branch enable ringing to take place for weddings, funerals and other special occasions.

Monthly practices take place on the second Monday evening (7.30-9.00pm) each month and are well supported by many local ringers enabling everyone to make progress with their ringing.

Two events are planned to be held this year. In July Salisbury Branch will hold a Bells & Picnic afternoon. In September the Salisbury Diocesan Guild of Ringers will be holding their annual 8-bell Striking Competition in Amesbury.

Liz Wrighton
Tower Captain/Correspondent

Links

Church of England Parish Map

<https://www.arcgis.com/home/webmap/print.html>

Census data for Amesbury

<https://explore-local-statistics.beta.ons.gov.uk/areas/E04011623-amesbury>

Amesbury Parish website

<https://www.amesburyparishchurch.org/church-life>

Salisbury Diocese

<https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/acny/stonehenge/634356/amesbury-st-mary--st-melor>

Amesbury Parish Church wins Gold Award

<https://www.salisbury.anglican.org/howeare/news/amesbury-parish-church-wins-gold-award->

A church near you

https://www.achurchnearyou.com/search/?acny_search_place=Amesbury&lat=51.1679201&lon=-1.7629783&place=Amesbury,+Salisbury+SP4,+UK&postcode=SP4&text=

Amesbury CE Primary School

<https://www.amesbury.wilts.sch.uk/>

Stonehenge School

<https://www.stonehenge.wilts.sch.uk/>

Amesbury Town Council

<https://www.amesburytowncouncil.gov.uk/>

Wiltshire Council

<https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/>

Amesbury History Centre

<https://www.amesburyhistorycentre.org.uk/amesbury-history>

