



St Thomas Parish Church Exeter



Parish Profile

January 2026

DIOCESE
OF EXETER



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Welcome

In prayerful humility, grateful appreciation to God, and hopeful excitement, the people of St Thomas Parish Church, Exeter seek to appoint a suitable candidate to the role of Rector (full-time incumbent).

This is a crucial moment in the history of our church, as we are both facing certain key challenges and exploring many opportunities to expand our role in the work that God is doing in our community.

This document offers the information that we think a candidate who is considering applying for the role needs to know in order to help them make a decision to explore the opportunity.

If you like what you learn about St Thomas, are excited by the ministry opportunity here, and see your skills and experience reflected in the person specification on p.20, please consider applying!





Welcome

A Message from Bishop Mike, Bishop of Exeter and Patron of St Thomas

Our vision in this diocese is that of Jesus in His Great Commission. We aspire to appoint leaders of our Christian communities who practice the presence of our Lord and enable others to do so; leaders who witness, act and relate in ways which make disciples and enable others to do so; leaders who serve in ways which intrigue, attract and engage the wider community, and enable others to do so. In short – pray, grow and serve!

So, we are looking for ministerial leaders who

- are intentionally missional, helping their Christian community to discern who God is sending them to, and who God is sending them.
- are developing missional habits and confidence in the faith for members of their congregations, enabling them to be invitational and ambassadorial.
- invest in their own discipleship and well-being, and that of those in their care.
- cultivate vocations, lay and ordained, actively recruiting for initiatives such as the Foundations course and the Exeter Ordination Pathway.
- place children and young people at the heart of our mission, orienting churches to be ever-more welcoming spaces for young people, using existing resources and networks, but also being pioneering in outlook.
- experiment with ways of being and doing church that engage the unengaged – we encourage ambitious plans such as creating two new worshipping communities in the first three years of a new ministry.



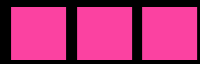
Bishop of Exeter

The Rt Rev'd Dr Mike Harrison

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

www.exeter.anglican.org



Welcome

You can expect to find

- support from senior leaders committed to enabling this mission and ministry.
- an outstanding diocesan team, second to none in terms of training provision and opportunities, comms understanding, finance expertise, buildings experience and care for our ministers.
- opportunities for personal and professional development in alignment with the vision of the Great Commission.
- a warm, relational diocese, where diversity is welcomed and honoured.
- a good-humoured, joyful, energetic culture grateful for the privilege of being called into ministry and supportive of missional experimentation, risk-taking and 'having a go'.

If you're still reading then I suspect we might be on the same page and I pray that the Holy Spirit might inform, shape and direct your discernment concerning this post.



Bishop of Exeter

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Archdeacon's Foreword

Welcome, and thank you for your interest!

This post offers an exciting opportunity to minister in one of our vibrant urban communities. The church within this large parish is set in the heart of St Thomas and is on a major route into the city. Like many communities in Devon, there are challenges: an ageing demographic, questions of sustainability, and the practical realities of buildings and finance. But there is a big opportunity here and real hope, alongside a strong commitment to growth and renewal.

We are seeking a priest and leader with a deep personal spirituality and a passion for mission through social justice; someone who will inspire and equip others, bringing energy, creativity, and innovation to the role of incumbent. You will be supported by a small but committed local team, an Area Bishop who prioritises the well-being of the clergy and the mission of our church among children and families, and an Archdeacon who will support your ministry practically and pastorally. Together, you will help this parish to flourish.

St Thomas is a single-parish benefice covering a key area of west of the city of Exeter. The benefice is part of the Christianity Deanery, where the City Dean is the Rev'd Ed Hodges and Assistant City Dean is the Rev'd Mike Clark.

We are committed to being a diverse and representative diocese and warmly welcome applications from women and those from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds. Devon is not only a beautiful place to call home, but it is also a diocese where community, creativity, and collaboration thrive.

If you would like a confidential conversation about this post, please do get in touch. We look forward to welcoming you to the Diocese of Exeter.



Archdeacon of Exeter
The Venerable Andrew Beane
☎ 07898932654
✉ ade@exeter.anglican.org



Area Bishop
Bishop of Crediton
The Rt. Rev'd Moira Astin



City Dean
The Rev'd Ed Hodges



Dioocese of Exeter

Inspiring Faith in Devon

Overview

Population: 1.2m,
120 Mission Communities
483 parishes, 594 churches
Worshipping community of 20,000

Five Missional Priorities



Missional DNA



Missional Leadership



Mixed Ecology



Children & Young People



Vocations

Served By

3 Bishops
4 Archdeaonries
188 Stipendiary clergy
54 SSMs, 197 LLMs
134 church schools

3 Major Urban Areas

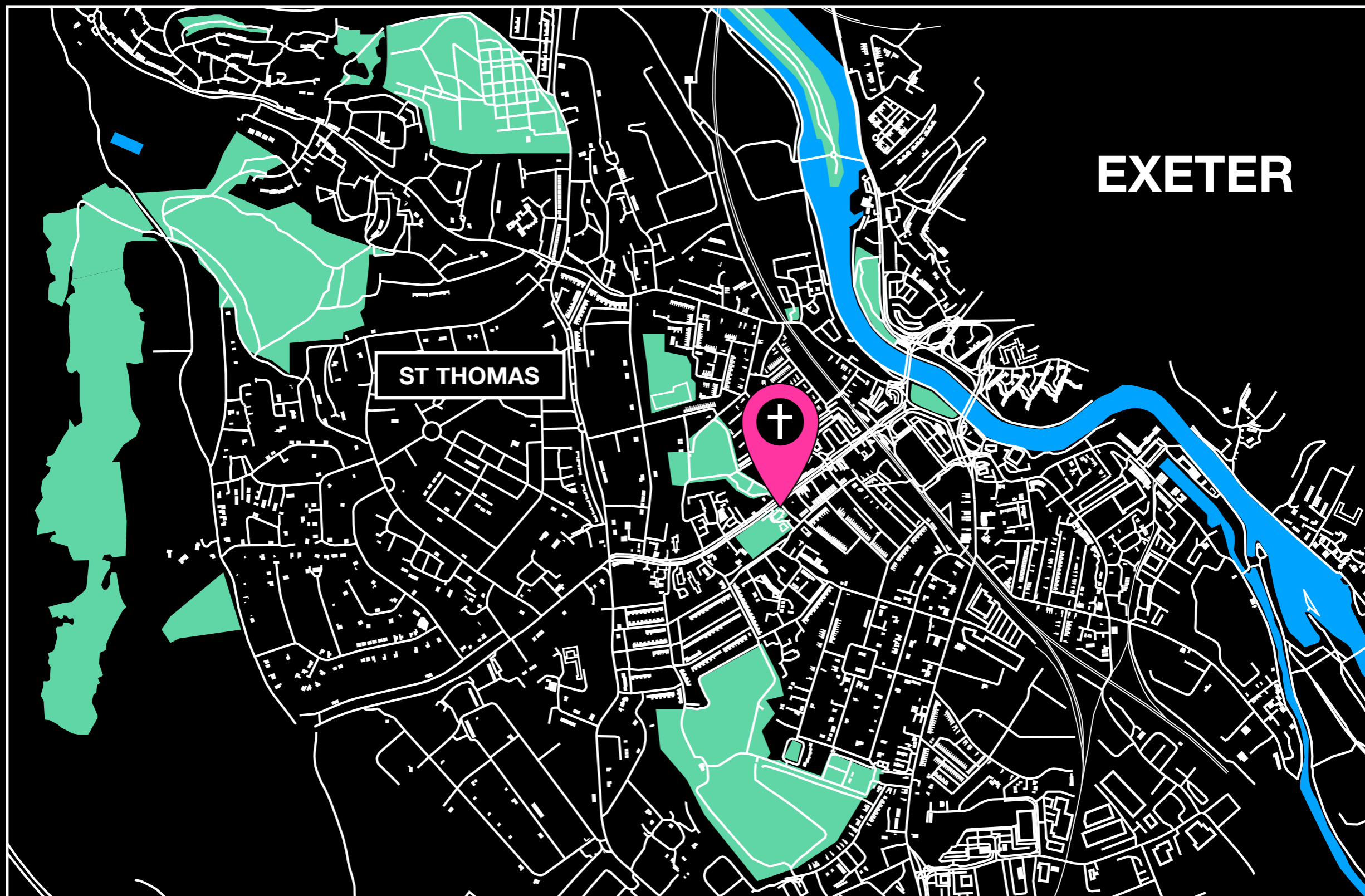
Plymouth (population: 265,000)
Exeter (population: 135,000)
Torbay (population: 141,000)

Coastal & Market Towns

Over 50 towns (population: 373,000)
5 large towns (population: >20,000)
14 towns (population: >10,000)
Expected to grow by 40,000



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St Thomas

St Thomas lies in the south-west of Exeter, on the west side of the River Exe. Situated outside the Roman city walls and on what was historically considered the *wrong side of the river*, today St Thomas is a bustling area of just under 20k people that leans into that historic sense of slight separation from the city and has cultivated a vibrant, distinctive character and strong sense of local community.

It has the feeling of an urban village (having been described as the Battersea of Exeter) and is known for its parks and green spaces, a cluster of independent retailers, close proximity to Exeter's historic quayside—now a thriving hub for hospitality, outdoor pursuits, and arts and crafts—and its several community groups, events, and initiatives.

Our location offers easy access to the M5 as well as to visits to Dartmoor or south Devon and Cornwall via the A30/A38. A local railway station connects to the mainline via regular services to Exeter St Davids (which is otherwise a 25min walk or short drive away) and provides simple access to beaches and coastline at Dawlish Warren, Dawlish, and Teignmouth in one direction and the Exe Estuary and Exmouth in the other.





St Thomas

St Thomas is popular with younger families as well as older folk (c.60% of the population is <45 and 15% >70). It boasts a nursery school, four primary schools (one of which has recently become a Church of England school), two schools offering alternative provision for children with additional needs, and a secondary school.

It also has a health centre, a community hospital, a dental surgery, three pharmacies, five nursing homes and a number of developments offering assisted living, a branch library, a leisure centre (inc. swimming pool, sports courts, and gym), two climbing centres, a bowling alley, eight supermarkets, and a large number of smaller shops, cafés, restaurants, and pubs.

Overall, the parish is in the 43rd percentile in the 2025 *English Indices of Deprivation* data, though some neighbourhoods (LSOAs) within it score significantly lower on a range of markers and experience very real challenges associated with higher levels of deprivation. Overall crime rates are low and it is generally a very safe and friendly place to live.



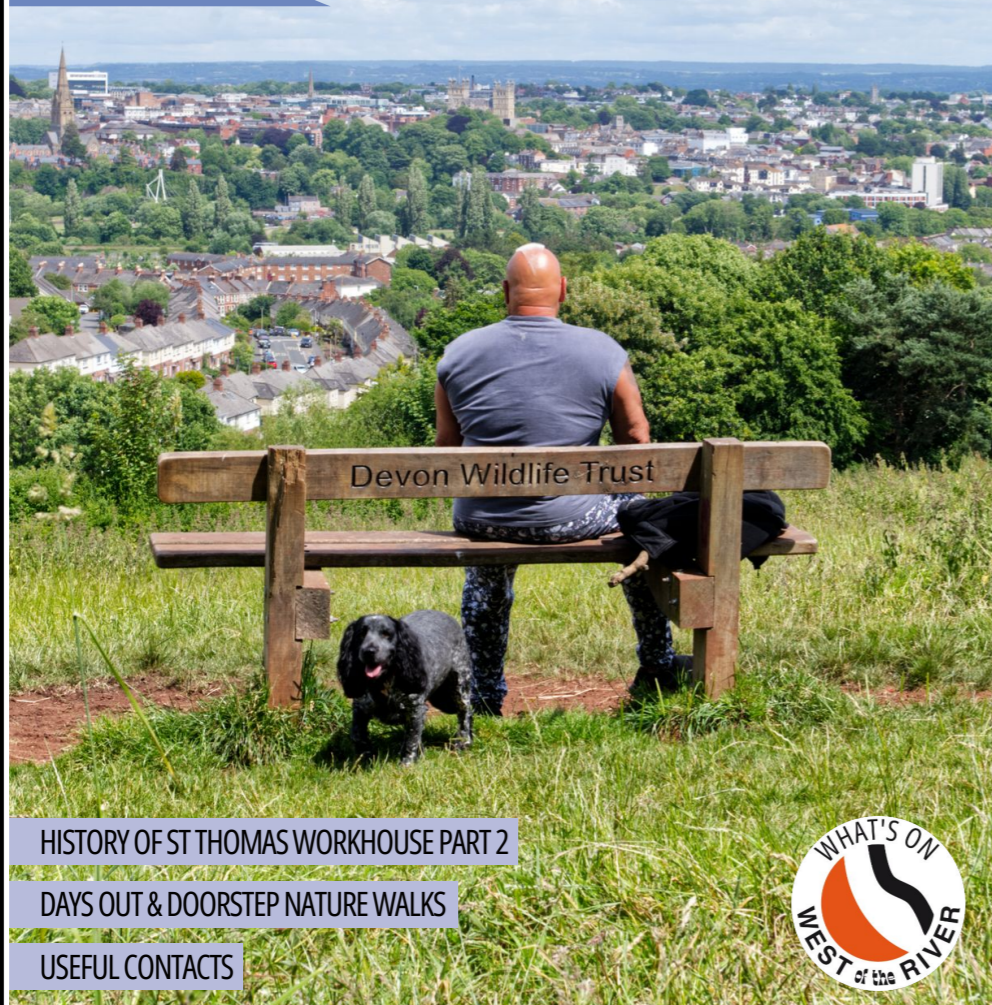
St Gabriel's C of E Primary School

Our exceptional curriculum and beautifully designed Orchard, and Early Years environment, give children the best start possible to their school journey.



WEST of the RIVER

JULY 2025
issue 2



HISTORY OF ST THOMAS WORKHOUSE PART 2

DAYS OUT & DOORSTEP NATURE WALKS

USEFUL CONTACTS



CELEBRATING, CONNECTING & AMPLIFYING COMMUNITIES WEST OF THE RIVER EXE



LOVE ST THOMAS SUMMER FESTIVAL

LOVE ST THOMAS LIVE STAGE
 REVELATION ROOTS • POCO DROM • TANO TAIKO
 MUM'S CHOIR EXETER • WALKING WOUNDED
 ANNA JANOTA'S DANCE WORKSHOP

CARPARK DISCO
 CHARITY CHOP SOUND SYSTEM VS RATCHIC
 ELKA • LADY MELZA • LEE WALLER • SAM CHAN
 THE LIVE BLIND DATE EXPERIENCE

IN CONVERSATION
 AGILE RABBIT PRESENTS PROFESSOR MARK
 RAMSDALE • DR KENSA BROADHURST
 PROF MARK STOYLE • DR TODD GRAY

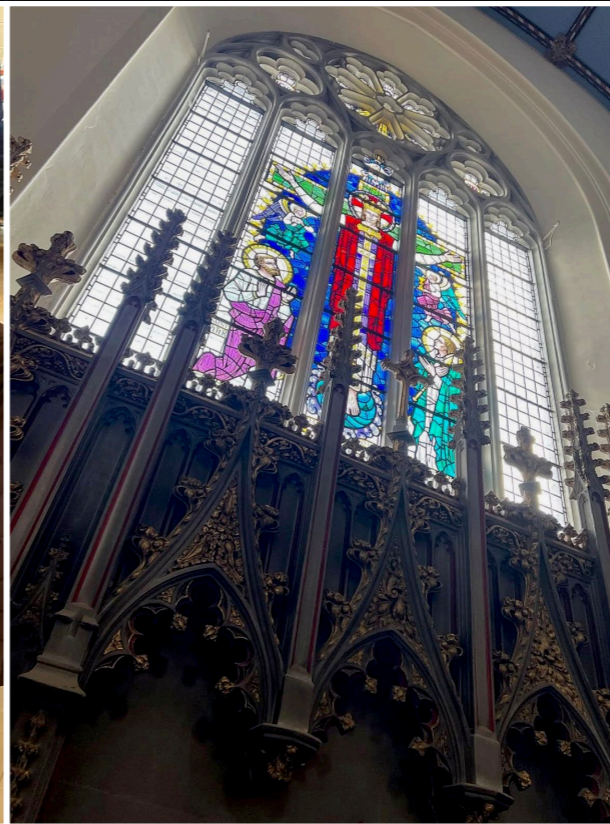
KIDS AND ADULT ACTIVITIES
 BADGE MAKING • BOUNCY CASTLE • EXETER
 TAI CHI • HENNA • KIDS YOGA WITH KAREN
 RAMM • RICKY'S YOGA • SPARKLY SONIA AND
 GRETA FACE PAINTING • ST THOMAS LIBRARY BOOK
 SALE • STEVE MCCRACKEN • THEATRE ALIBI
 BUBBLES BY CHARLOTTE KNOX

**AND NOT FORGETTING TOPSHAM BREWERY,
 INTERNATIONAL FOOD MARKET, INDEPENDENT
 CRAFT STALLS, STRAWBERRIES, TEA AND CAKE,
 SO MUCH MORE...**

SATURDAY 19TH JULY
 12 – 7PM • THE OLD CHURCH YARD
 A FAMILY FRIENDLY, COMMUNITY CENTRED FESTIVAL

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE FESTIVAL AT [f](#) [i](#)
 The Old Churchyard, Cowick Street, Exeter, EX4 1AP





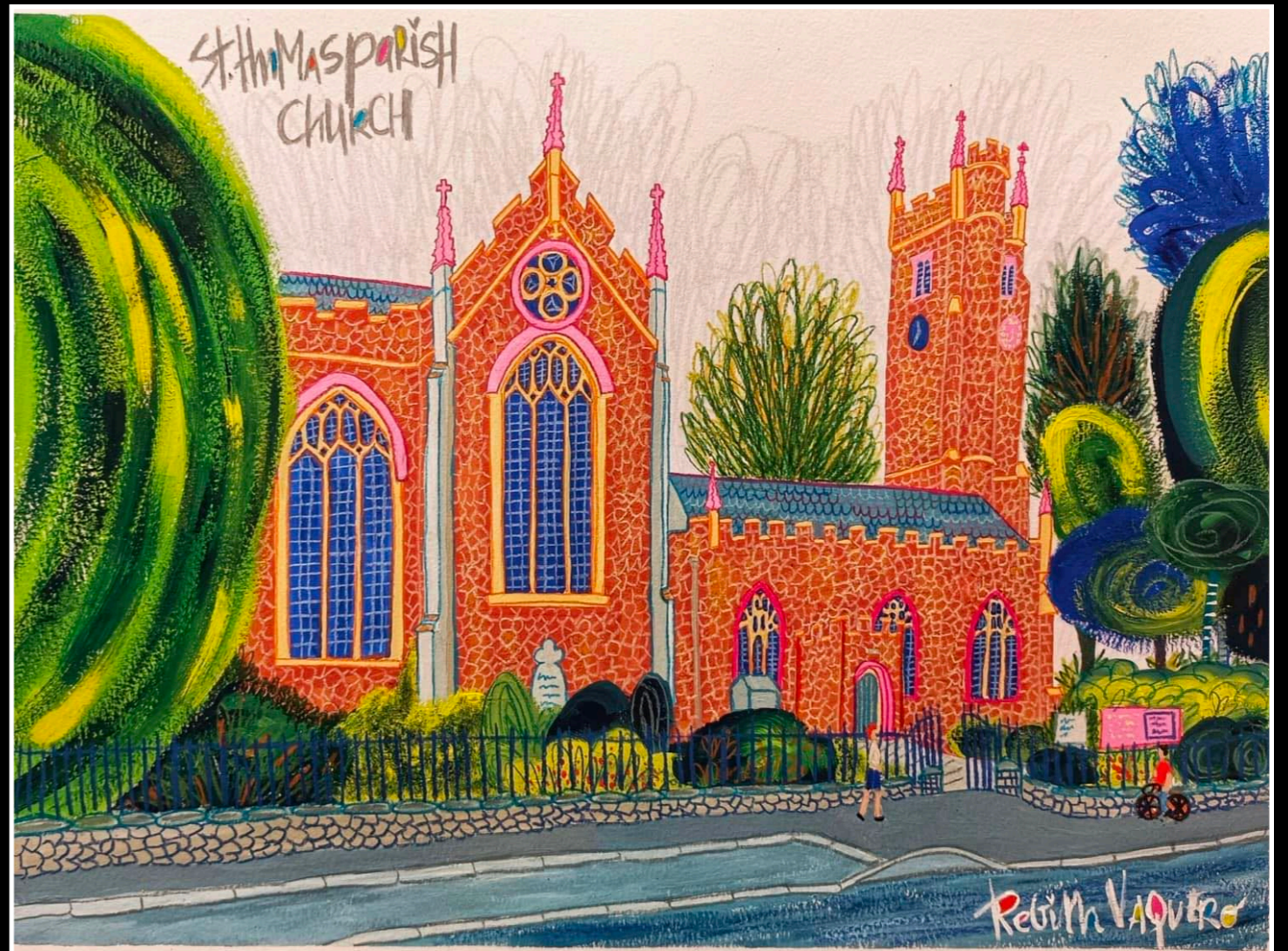
St Thomas Parish Church

In Anglican terms, we are a one church parish and our building stands right on the central thoroughfare, in the heart of St Thomas.

We are an inclusive church that sits broadly within the liberal catholic tradition of the Church of England. Celebration of the Eucharist, practice of liturgy both solemn and celebratory, challenging engagement with the Bible and the Christian tradition, faithful prayer, discerning the Spirit's work, serving our neighbours, and engaging in local and global struggles for justice are all priorities for us as a worshipping community.

We unequivocally support and celebrate the priestly ministry of women and fully affirm LGBTQ+ people, praying and longing for the day when both are true throughout the Church.

We are one of four churches in the area: the others are St Thomas Methodist Church, St Thomas Baptist Church, and Riverside Church Exeter, a Pentecostal church in the Assemblies of God family. An independent evangelical church called Grace Church Exeter also has its offices in the parish. Relationships between the churches are friendly and there are established joint initiatives, including shared services with St Thomas Methodist Church, ecumenical outreach events, and a popular joint carol service with Grace Church Exeter.



St Thomas Parish Church (2022)
by local artist Regina Vaquero



St Thomas Parish Church

Licensed Ministry Team



Rev'd Sarah Cumming

Sarah is Assistant Priest at St Thomas and works as a primary school teacher. She is currently on secondment to a neighbouring parish.



Philip Baker

Phil is a Licensed Lay Minister at St Thomas. He was made a Reader in 1978 and has been licensed at St Thomas since 2002.



Rev'd Terry Litherland

Terry became an Ordained Local Minister in the Manchester Diocese in 1993, but is now an Exeter resident with PTO here. He is a retired former carpenter and joiner.



Liz Dunbar

Liz is a Pioneer Licensed Lay Minister at St Thomas. She trained in Pioneer Mission and in 2025 became the first licensed lay pioneer in the Diocese of Exeter.

In addition to our licensed ministers, we are fortunate to have two committed and able Churchwardens, a full PCC, an experienced Treasurer, and two experienced Safeguarding Officers, and a committed and talented Director of Music and organist. We also have an experienced parish administrator who volunteers time each week, though we are currently looking to add paid resourcing in this area.



St Thomas Parish Church

Our main service of the week is at 10:30 AM on Sunday when we celebrate a Sung Eucharist using liturgy from Common Worship. Certain of these services are designated as ‘all-age’ with a particular emphasis on addressing multi-generational inclusion, and we have a strong tradition of lay involvement in intercessions, readings, and preaching. We normally see around 60 people at this service. We also celebrate a small midweek communion on a Wednesday morning.

We particularly emphasise major festivals, running a full programme of services at Christmas and for Holy Week and Easter.

Our theology is inclusive, and while our regular worship tends towards the traditional—with sung liturgy, procession, and organ-led hymns—we are open to many forms of theological and liturgical expression and encounter. We want people to feel at home in our services whatever their tradition.

Over winter, outside of certain Christmas services, we are currently meeting for worship in the church hall due to a permanent failure of the heating in the main church. While it was initially thought prudent to wait and remedy this as part of the major works, we are now exploring a more temporary fix.

We have a tradition as a teaching parish and have benefitted greatly from the ministry of many curates over the years. We would very much like to see that pattern continue.





St Thomas Parish Church

House groups from the church meet fortnightly to pray, study, and learn together. We have at various times had regular parish quiet days, retreats, and pilgrimages.

Pastoral care plays a big role in the life of the church and there is an emphasis on home visits, communion at home, hospital visiting, and leading services in the local care homes. Much of this ministry is lay-led.

Groups from the congregation meet regularly for meals, to knit and chat, and to engage in social activism, and we have run quizzes, bingo, and board game nights, met for walks, and gone tenpin bowling together and as a gentle entry point for anyone interested in joining us.



Jesus taught his followers to love and to welcome everyone, especially those who others shunned.

We absolutely reject any use of Christian symbols or language to demonise and scapegoat refugees, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, people of colour, LGBTQ+ people, or any marginalised group.





History of St Thomas Church

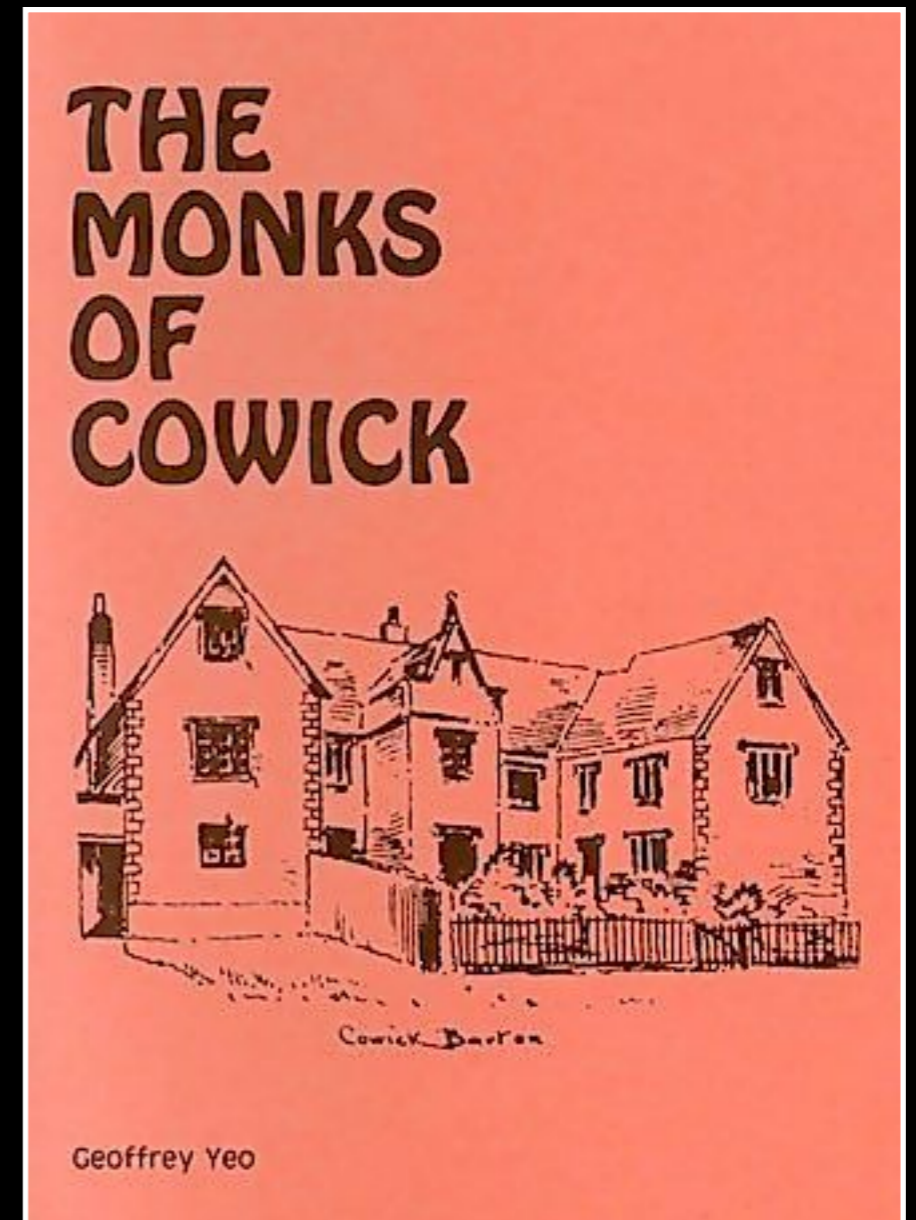
In 1160, a Benedictine priory was established by monks from the Norman Abbey of Bec at Cowick, part of what is St Thomas today. The Abbey remained until its dissolution in 1539, housing among many others a once renowned hermit folk-saint known as Walter of Cowick.

For the century following the arrival of the monks, the Priory Church offered services for the residents of the surrounding area. In 1261, a chapel dedicated to St Thomas Becket built near to the first stone bridge crossing the River Exe was consecrated for public use by the Bishop of Exeter and the first vicar of St Thomas was installed.

A hundred and fifty years later, that first St Thomas church was flooded and washed away and it was resolved to build a new one further from the river. The new church was built on the current site on Cowick St and dedicated in 1412.

When, in the face of forced implementation of the Book of Common Prayer, the people of Cornwall and Devon rose up and marched on Exeter in 1549, Robert Welshe, then vicar of St Thomas, was convicted of aiding the rebels in defending their religious liberties. Welshe was hanged from the church tower in his robes and left there for three years as a warning to other challengers of the reforms.

After the Priory was dissolved at the height of Henry VIII's purges, the parish distanced itself from its connection to Thomas Becket and allowed a more politic connection with Thomas the Apostle to be made. The ambiguity of the name St Thomas allows for recognition of both saints.





History of St Thomas Church

In 1645, during the height of local Civil War hostilities, the original early C15th building was razed to the ground. Due to widespread sympathy and substantial donations, it was rebuilt using much of the original stone and restored to use in 1657, being initially overseen by a Presbyterian minister. In 1662, after the Restoration of the Monarchy, John Reynolds (grandfather of the artist Sir Joshua Reynolds) was appointed Vicar, and Anglican worship resumed.

The current building is a mixture of medieval Gothic elements, the C17th rebuild (with the Nave, Tower, South Aisle, and Chapel of St Thomas of Canterbury dating from that time), and substantial later Victorian expansion and restoration done in the Gothic Revival style.

We still administer the distribution of a group of historic endowments (one of which dates from the C17th) that were variously established to provide for the poor of the parish. We convene a committee to oversee this work which includes invited representatives of the community beyond the church.

We seek to be responsible stewards of what we have inherited, both in terms of the church building and its grounds, but also the wider legacy of the work of Christian faith here over many centuries. We take inspiration from this history, and solace from the several stories of the church's being partially or fully destroyed only to be restored and revitalised. We look to the future guided by responsibility but also full of hope, buoyed by the knowledge that God's unfolding work of love here is by no means dependent on our successes or failures.





Key Challenges

Like many C of E churches, our congregation tends towards elderly. One demographic that is especially under-represented given the makeup of our broader community is families with school-age children. Despite welcoming substantial numbers of young candidates for baptism over the last decade and having had sustainable Messy Church and Sunday School ministry running at times over that period, disruptions and transitions associated with the COVID pandemic and a lack of new families joining the congregation have meant that we now have very few U16s at our regular services. The congregation also lacks people in the 16-25 age range.

While historically significant and beautiful in places, our church building is currently inflexible, lacks essential amenities, and has previously suffered damage from water ingress and general dilapidation. Working with a local architect, we have produced plans for a substantial project to repair the building and reorder the space. The application for the required faculty is currently underway, and we are hopeful of being able to secure funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to carry out the work. The HLF, as was, granted us awards previously, which along with fundraising, paid for the work required to save the building, stabilising it and arresting its decline, and to restore the east end. That work was completed in 2015 and 2018 respectively.

The practical and psychological impacts of the COVID pandemic on our congregation were profound and effectively put an end to several aspects of our church life, with fewer activities and a narrower range of worshipping practices having become the norm since than was the case prior.

Although we have worked hard to remain in good financial standing with the Diocese, our current income falls short of our obligations.



Strengths and Opportunities

The closure and subsequent sale of two former churches in the parish means that we have a significant lump sum of capital which provides interest that makes up our income shortfall, but which, going forward, will need to be used with strategic wisdom to help advance our planned building project.

Our parish hall (The St Thomas Centre) was opened in 2010. It is well-equipped and an excellent resource. Located in the church grounds and serviced by a private car park, it is very well used by local groups as well as for regular church-organised activities, provides stable income, and is widely recognised as a hub of the community. One particularly important group that we run in the hall is 'St Thomas Tots' a weekly parent-and-child group which is popular and does vital work. We are currently looking at expanding our work with this group.

The church is involved in community initiatives that see our churchyard and buildings regularly host large and well-loved local events including a summer festival, a multicultural All Souls festival, and a Christmas fair—which between them bring several thousand people into the churchyard, church, and church hall.

We have good relationships with the primary schools in the parish, regularly hosting class visits and having a standing invitation for clergy to visit assemblies and contribute to Christmas performances. Since St Gabriel's School acquired Church school status in 2023, there have been much greater opportunities for the church and its ministers to play a role in the life of the school through visits, a Foundation representative on the Local Advocate Board, and hosting school services. There is a burgeoning relationship with the local secondary school which could be expanded.



Strengths and Opportunities

We were encouraged to see during the Advent and Christmas just passed that various of our services and events were well-attended and garnered positive feedback. The church was completely packed for our annual joint carol service with Grace Church Exeter, our crib service on Christmas Eve filled the church hall, and later that night at Midnight Mass there was a good turnout with lots of faces that we don't often see. Likewise, several people came to and enjoyed our Advent window decoration workshop, lots expressed gratitude for our Blue Christmas service, and we had encouraging amounts of engagement in response to daily posts on Facebook during Advent in which we thanked God for a different subsection of our community each day.

Our core congregation is faithful, prayerful, concerned about our future, and (when they are pitched sensitively) open to new ideas, initiatives, and ways of being church in this place.

We are convinced that at St Thomas we have huge potential to expand our current work, capitalise more on our prominent role within the community, and, with the help of good leadership and by the grace of God, to grow in number and faith, and thrive moving forward.

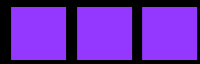


Specifics

Rector (Full-time Incumbent)

We are seeking a priest who

- has a strong personal spirituality, rooted in prayer, study, and the sacraments.
- has an inclusive theology and a warm, welcoming, and affirming approach to ministry.
- is comfortable with our broad liberal catholic tradition and the centrality of the Eucharist, but also willing to explore with us other patterns of worship and to embrace and develop our ecumenical work.
- is a capable and wise teacher who can help us to grow in number and in spiritual depth, inspiring us to a greater understanding of and love for God and our neighbours, the study of Scripture and Tradition, the power of prayer, and the Christian life.
- is socially and politically engaged, ready to be outspoken on behalf of marginalised people, and with a desire to inspire and guide us as we engage in struggles for justice and righteousness, locally and globally.
- is an enthusiastic and capable communicator who is passionate about and able to help us develop our work with our schools, families, and young people.
- is a compassionate, patient, and empathetic pastor who can come alongside and care for those in need, especially the older members of our church community.
- is an effective leader and project manager, ideally with experience of grant capture and building/reordering projects.
- is collaborative and excited by the opportunity to be part of wider community organisation and leadership beyond the Church in a place where there are significant social needs but a strong and growing network of community initiatives.
- is open to and capable of undertaking the responsibilities involved in training curates.
- has a sense of humour and an openness about the frustrations and failures that beset ministry and life in general.
- is well-organised, aware of and communicative about their health and wellbeing, and disciplined about boundaries, taking a regular day off, time away from the parish, and holidays.



The Rectory

The incumbent's house is:

The Rectory, 49 Okehampton Rd, EX4 1EL

A double-fronted Edwardian house dating from 1910, it features three reception rooms including a large study, a kitchen, a utility room, and a cloakroom on the ground floor, and four bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. There is a large garden to the rear including a hard standing and garage, and a smaller garden at the front with off-road parking for several cars (see additional photos on the next page). While the interior is in good repair, the details of earmarked improvements can be agreed with the successful candidate and any family after appointment.

The Rectory is c.10 mins flat walk from the church. It is situated very conveniently for connecting with the major driving routes both out of and across the city, is 20 mins walk along the river from Exeter St Davids railway station, and is close to bus routes serving the city centre. It is 90s walk from a convenience store and Post Office, and just a few minutes walk from both Exe Bridges Retail Park (incl. Boots, M&S Food, Burger King), St Thomas Precinct (incl. Co-op, ATM, The Butchery, Greggs), and Riverside Leisure Centre (gym, swimming pool).

Further details about the house are available in the Property Information Document.



