

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ALL SAINTS
ELTON
PETERBOROUGH

Text, design, photography

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as
Community Assets for the Common Good)**
is a multi-partner research project that
aims to help communities make fuller use
of their churches.

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The project is implemented by

**Centre for Social Innovation at
Cambridge Judge Business School
and the Diocese of Ely**

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and Historic England*

www.reachely.org

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website www.reachely.org

On the cover: Detail of All Saints church clock dials.

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ALL SAINTS ELTON PETERBOROUGH

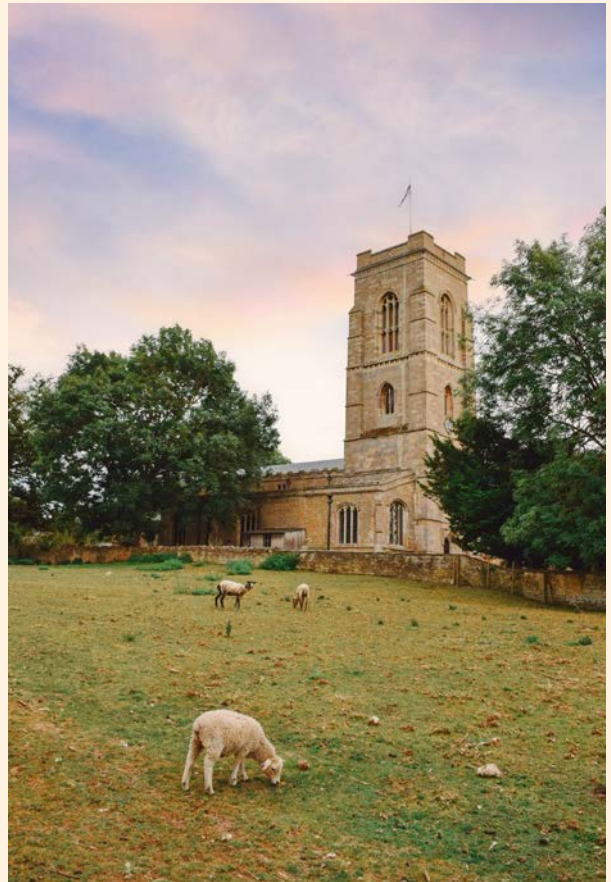
Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Yaxley

Address: Overend, Elton, Peterborough
PE8 6RU

Website: www.stiltonchurches.com/elton

The Stilton Group of Churches:
www.stiltonchurches.com



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade II* listed; Saxon wheel crosses and stonework fragments; The Proby family memorials; Arts and Crafts style stained glass; Car park

Congregation to Population Ratio: 20 / 668

Fundraising: Donations; Fabric Fund Committee; Reordering Project Group; Sponsored Ride and Stride; Charity Auction

Income Generation: General giving; Theatre productions and concerts; Coffee mornings

Communications: All Saints Elton and Stilton Group of Churches websites; Stilton Group of Churches Facebook; Emails; Tours of reconstruction works

Community Engagement: Collaborations with the Stilton Group of Churches and village school; Parish walk.

ROOTS



Profile

Elton is a small village with a population of 668 people (2016) in north-west Cambridgeshire, situated on the edge of the diocesan border. The village is in close proximity to transport links which make it well connected to Peterborough, Huntingdon, and Cambridge. To the south of the All Saints Elton church is Elton Hall, an historic house, gardens and landscaped park. Visible from the All Saints Elton church tower is Fotheringhay Castle, a popular tourist attraction, Yorkist memorial and the execution site of Mary Queen of Scots. Elton village has two public houses, Church of England Primary School, village hall, and village shop. Originally the villages of Elton and Over End each had their own Manor houses. A former railway station, closed in 1953, is now on a popular walking route.

Building

The Domesday survey (1086) mentioned an All Saints church in Elton, the fragments of which still remain. The chancel, nave, aisles, and tower of the present Grade II* listed building date from the 13th-16th centuries. In the 19th century, the church was re-extensively re-ordered to a design by J.L.Pearson. Located on the main street in the centre of the village, the church is highly visible. All Saints Elton is surrounded by a spacious churchyard with benches and a public footpath next to the car park. Since 2002, Sir William Proby has been Patron of the church.

Elton Hall, the ancestral home of the Proby family since 1660, is a popular tourist destination and a short walk from the church.

The northern wall of the church building has an extension for a boiler house. The church tower is accessible and the belfry houses five bells. All Saints Elton can accommodate about 300 people and is kept open daily from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. At present, the church building has no kitchen or WC facilities.

Artefacts

Traces of the Saxon period include wheel crosses by the tower in the churchyard and a number of small head carvings in the north aisle vestries. The tower, built in c.1500, is in late Perpendicular style and has a large sundial and gargoyles all around. Under the tower are fragments of Saxon stonework and a coffin lid from the earlier Saxon church arranged for display. Memorials to distinguished members of the Proby family, for example, an Admiral, Colonel and Lord Lieutenant are inside the building. The oak pulpit was the gift of Father Frederick Wilfrid Faber (1814-1863), prior rector at All Saints Elton and founder of the Brompton Oratory, London. The examples of the fine stained glass from the Arts and Crafts movement (1880-1920) can be seen in the west window of the south aisle. A war memorial stands by the eastern entrance to the churchyard. The altar has carved angel feet.



Top: Public footpath and church entrance doors. Middle: View of the churchyard from the All Saints' tower; Wheel crosses from the Saxon period in the churchyard. Bottom: Elton village sign; North wall of the church building with a boiler house.

RUNNING

Team

All Saints Elton is a member of the Stilton Group, a family of five churches that includes St Mary Magdalene Stilton, All Saints Morborne, St Mary Haddon and St Helens Folksworth. The Stilton Group shares a single incumbent and offers a diversity of worship and midweek activities. The Stilton Group is lead primarily by the vicar and each church has local churchwardens and PCC. Whilst not being the largest village in the group, All Saints is the largest church and as such hosts some of the important group services such as the licensing of new clergy.

Religious Services

The congregation of All Saints Elton tend to share conventional and conservative views on parish church services. Religious services are distributed between the Stilton Group of Churches and each of the churches holds services every Sunday. In addition, every second and fourth Wednesday, All Saints Elton holds a midweek Holy Communion service, which follows the Book of Common Prayer (1662). An evening service, at 6 p.m., is held every second Sunday of the month. On a fifth Sunday, one of the churches of the Stilton Group holds a shared service.

Parish Share

In 2018, the parish share expenditure was £7,890. Parishes in the Yaxley deanery operate a bid system based on their ability to pay, to determine the individual parish shares. In the past the level of contribution was reduced by 50%. Over the time, as All Saints Elton's financial standing improved, their contributions have more than recovered.



Top: The altar view from the nave. Middle: Public information boards on Reordering Project and fundraising; Small space under the tower with the vestry. Bottom: The pulpit and the north wall with partially removed plaster; Sitting arrangement in the nave.

Fundraising

Donations. Fundraising, the proceeds from occasional offices and other donations are earmarked for the maintenance of the fabric of the church. It can then be stated that the funds generated from fundraising stay within the parish rather than used to meet the parish share demands.

Fabric Fund Committee. The Fabric Fund Committee (FCC) was founded by Sir Peter Proby in the early 1990s to raise funds to maintain and repair the fabric of the church building. The committee, acting as a Friends of the Church Group, helped to coordinate major projects and raise funds for solely for the fabric of the church. The last major project was the replacement of the church roof. At present, an active PCC has replaced the need for the FCC.

Reordering Project Group. To supplement the PCC in church renovation activities, a Reordering Project Group (RPG) has been established to rearrange and adapt the church for more flexible use. Other key functions of the RPG include fund raising and project management. Several PCC members have also joined the RPG.

Sponsored Ride and Stride. Since 2018, All Saints Elton has participated in the annual Ride+Stride (www.rideandstrideuk.org), a national sponsored bike ride or walk in which people walk or cycle between churches, explore the countryside and (re) discover rare churches. Supported by the National Churches Trust and in partnership with local church trusts – the Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust in the case of Elton – each year the event helps to raise over £1 million for urgent repairs and the installation of modern facilities. The funds are equally shared between a county church trust and the individual church. All Saints has benefitted from grants and loans from the Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust. The 2018 event helped All Saints Elton to purchase a video projector.

Charity Auction. To raise substantial funds for renovation of the church and community projects, All Saints Elton intends to host a charity auction in 2020 at which donated goods and services will be sold. Donations already committed include, for example, free holiday cottage accommodation and golf tuition. The auction is supported by patron Sir William Proby and will be held in the grounds of Elton Hall.

Opposite page, top row: Theatre performance in the church

(Photo by Elton church and This Is My Theatre: www.facebook.com/thisismytheatre).

Bottom: Gardens of Elton Hall; The view of Fotheringhay castle and church from the tower of All Saints Elton.



Income Generation

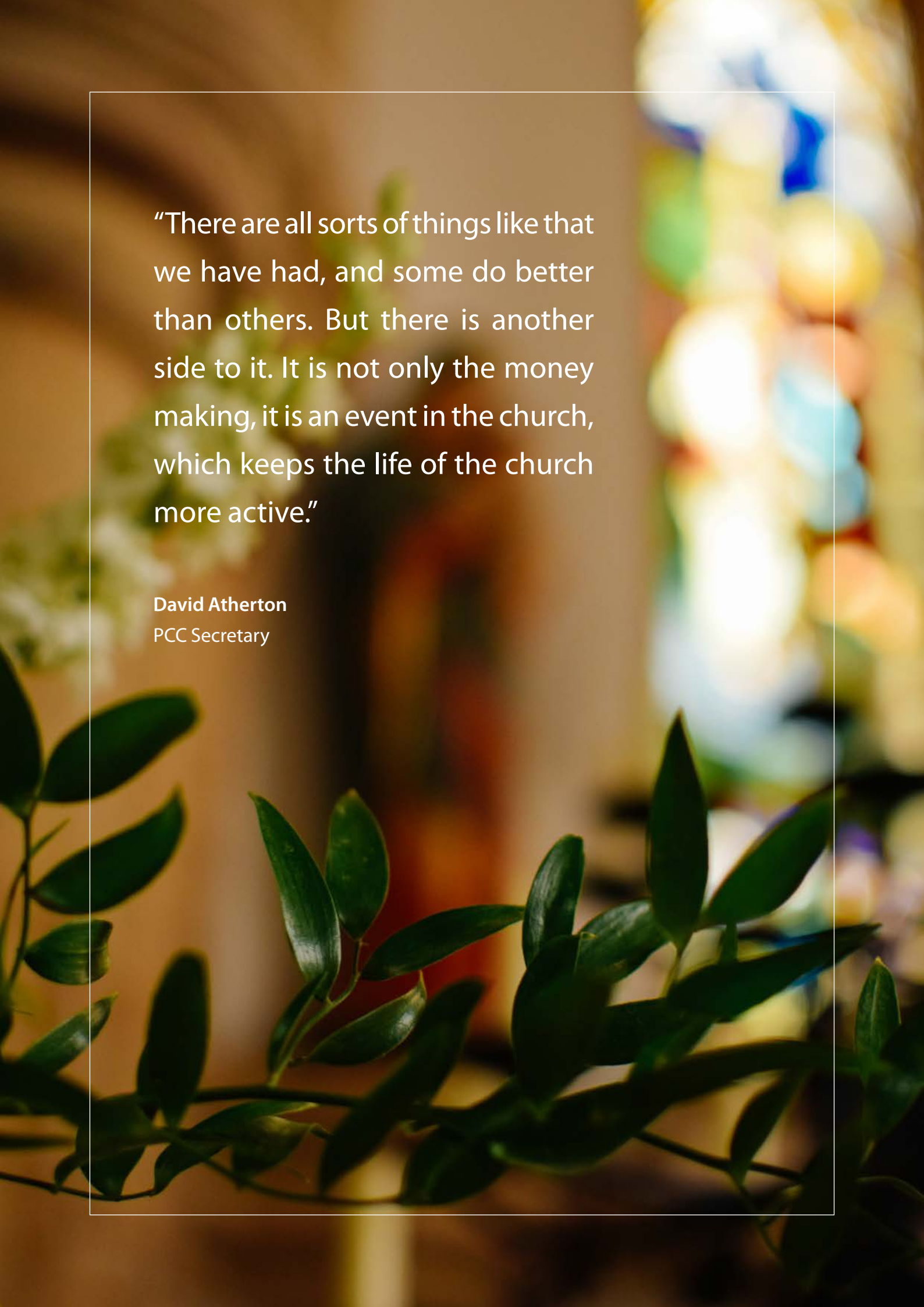
General Giving. The church building enjoys a great deal of support from the local community with good response for coffee mornings fundraising events and cash donations to support major projects, the stained glass and the re-ordering. In 2018, £18,000 with a further £15,000 in 2019 were received to help fund the Re-ordering Project.

Theatre Productions and Concerts. All Saints Elton generates income from a percentage of ticket sales for performances by This Is My Theatre, a young theatrical travelling group that performs in historic venues and open spaces. Recent productions of 'A Christmas Carol' and 'The Wind in the Willows' made use of the entire church building and were supported by the wider local community. In the past, All Saints also

hosted the Oundle School String Orchestra and Rusty Players of Oundle, and organised a combined **open day** and **flower festival** in the church building.

Communications

All Saints Elton **website** is shared with the Stilton Group of Churches. The Group runs a **Facebook page**. During the restoration of the church tower, **guided tours** were organised to demonstrate ongoing works (*see Events*). All Saints produces a monthly **newsletter** prepared by a church group and advertises events by email and on village noticeboards. Church **Visitors' Book** records notes from travellers complimenting the building and its artefacts. A small sandwich **noticeboard** 'Church is Open' is set at the south porch in the churchyard and is much appreciated by visitors.



“There are all sorts of things like that we have had, and some do better than others. But there is another side to it. It is not only the money making, it is an event in the church, which keeps the life of the church more active.”

David Atherton
PCC Secretary

REACH

Community

Reordering Project Group

In 2016, the All Saints Elton initiated a project to refurbish the stained glass windows in the church. A village resident and former Master of the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass volunteered to lead the stained glass window refurbishment project and found restorers. The group raised £26,000 and the project was supported by and engaged the local community. In 2017, the Bishop David of Huntingdon awarded All Saints Elton an Engage Award, a competition run by the Cambridgeshire Historic Churches Trust, for community engagement. It was noted that project had acted as a catalyst to raise awareness of the church, increase the congregation and donations, and became the springboard for the RPG.

The lack of kitchen and WC facilities in the church has been a major concern for the RPG. The RPG has prepared the statement of needs and has obtained permission from the Huntingdon District Council, the next stage being the request for a formal faculty from the Diocesan Chancellor prior to launching a fundraising campaign and grant applications. The vision is to install

a kitchen, WC facilities, improve heating and lighting and open up the building to serve post-service refreshments and host social gatherings. A new noticeboard located in the main street is also planned. It is estimated that if plans are approved, the construction works can start in 2020-21.

Events

Theatre performances

(See *Income Generation*).

Church Tower Tours. In 2013, after the church tower was refurbished, guided tours were organised by the architect and contractor to demonstrate how the raised funds had been used. In addition, the videos of the completed refurbishment works were shown in the church.

Coffee mornings. All Saints Elton's coffee mornings are well attended by at least 40 people. In 2019, the number of electoral roll members has risen from 47 to 56 people.

Activity group. A group of village bell-ringers ring the bells on Sundays and for family events.



Panoramic view of the chancel with the organ.

Engagement

Parish Walk. The vicar of the Stilton Group of churches initiated an annual parish walk for members of the public. The social non-fundraising event encourages people to meet up, socialise, explore the countryside, visit churches along the way, and learn local history. The 14-mile walk is organised in early May and connects the five member churches, beginning at Elton, passing Haddon, Morborne, Folksworth, and finishing at Stilton.

Collaboration with the village school. Over the year, the church primary school holds a number of services in the church, the largest being Christingle when 300 people, including 120 children, their families and teachers, attended the church for the service.



“As a church we have suffered from fifteen years where we have had five clergy and four periods of vacancy and uncertainty regarding the future of the parish church. For the past three years we have really seen the benefit of a priest who has a passion and commitment for expanding the church in the village, and we are now starting to enjoy a period of stability. Our congregation has been increasing, the number on the electoral roll has increased and we are not struggling to find volunteers willing to serve on the PCC.”

Chris Milton
Churchwarden



Clockwise: Detail of the East Window stained glass; Paddy Kitson's (11 year old) winning design of a window for the stained glass competition, a part of the 2016 Elton Stained Glass Window Restoration Appeal (Photo by Timur Alexandrov); Packed church to view the restored windows; Helen Whittaker of Barley Studios with the winners of the stained glass competition; Stained Glass Committee (Photo by Elton church).

REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Lack of young people

The parish demographic profile is predominantly senior with only a small number of young families – there are currently twenty local children in the local church school. As the village community is settled there is little turnover of private property, and this further impedes incoming young families.

Unsuccessful 'pub church' experiment

All Saints Elton sought to reach out to the community by delivering one of the Sunday services in a local public house. The PCC had hoped that pub customers would be interested in joining the congregation for the service. However, this proved to be unsuccessful as there was little public interest.

Church building condition

Although the most recent quinquennial inspection revealed few major faults with the church building, several church fabric issues are pressing. Internally, the falling plaster on the north wall has been removed to comply with health and safety concerns. Structurally, the wooden roof beams need repair and there are damp and drainage problems. The present oil fired central heating is costly – it usually takes twelve hours to heat the church for services. And while a small space under the tower area is currently used for serving post-service coffee, the area is too small and lacks facilities.

Persuading donors to support a church in an affluent village

Given that the All Saints Elton is located in the affluent village of Elton and supported by local patron, persuading charitable trusts and donors to fund restoration and refurbishment has proved to be very challenging. The renovation and refurbishment will benefit the whole the community but, the costs are high and beyond the capacity of the small village population.

Community attachment to church fixtures

A small number of people from the congregation expressed sceptical views over the rearrangement of church furniture and repair works as part of the RPG. In recognition of strong congregation attachment and also church building restrictions, there are no plans to replace the medieval and Victorian pews with modern chairs.

Lessons Learned

To build on positive community feedback and support

The importance of modernising the church building was realised by the community during the stained glass window repair project. The positive feedback from the community paved the way to a bigger renovation project.

“We had hoped that we’d be able to attract other people in with a different offering. There’ll be a slightly, I won’t say a very different, atmosphere, because you can’t change the atmosphere of the service, but I think there will probably be more opportunity for events, and I think people will look at the church. A great number of people look at the windows project say how fantastic it all is. We are rather hoping that the church reordering process will do the same thing.”

David Atherton

PCC Secretary

To foster collaborations with other churches

In addition to membership of the Stilton Churches Group, All Saints Elton holds joint services with the Methodist church on Remembrance Days and Good Fridays. All Saints’ has also hosted the Brompton Oratory on the anniversary of when Father Faber held a Catholic mass in the Elton church.

To be close to and listen to the local community

To reach out to villagers, members of the church organised **open house** sessions and invited neighbours to their houses. In addition, the **parish walk** (*See Events*) for the local community has become an annual public event.

To be open and welcoming

All Saints Elton strives to keep the church open during the day. Visitors can access a **self-guided tour booklet** that presents information about the church’s history and artefacts.

“We have a number of villagers making use of the church for a period of calm and reflection although they don't attend any of the services. Also over the second half of each year we hold special services (Service of Light, Harvest and Carols) where we specifically invite members of the village to take active part in one of these services. These have proven to be relatively successful in bringing some new people into the church.

The best way we have found to encourage more people to become part of the church is the personal approach, talking to people, inviting them to a service and providing coffee and biscuits at the end of each service.”

Chris Milton
Churchwarden



To find creative ways to generate funds

All Saints Elton has adopted a variety of activities and is willing to experiment with new methods, to raise funds to pay for renovation, refurbishment and running costs (*See Fundraising*).

“Firstly, a statement of needs, right at the beginning, before you involve architects or anybody else, is something you must do. And secondly, I would think is also try and form a group which is additional to the PCC, who can just concentrate on getting funds.”

Chris Milton
Churchwarden

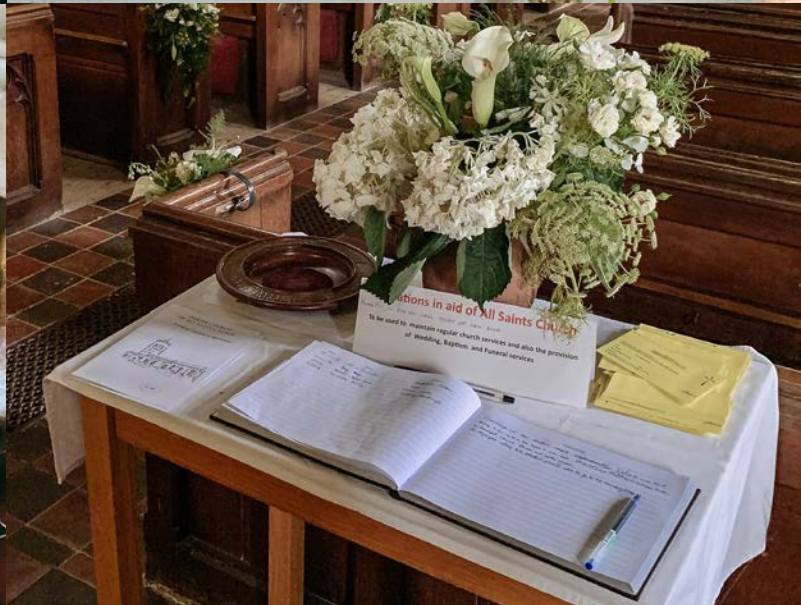
To allow sufficient time for new initiatives to be introduced

All Saints Elton is located in a conservation area and thus any changes to building fabric and use requires the involvement of the local authority conservation officer as well as the Diocesan Advisory Committee, and approval procedures tend to be lengthy. To avoid the impression that little action is taking place, information needs to be communicated to the community.

To strengthen connections with the local and wider community

Attending a religious service is just one measure of church community engagement. Other church activities, such as a secular carol service, can be a valuable opportunity to welcome community members into the church building. At All Saints Elton, people from different village organisations, the village school and the Methodist church are encouraged to attend the carol service and actively participate in the service.





“The church is open all day and that is good. Not only for people who come through Elton and say oh, we’ll go and have a look, that’s a nice old church, but for people, as Chris has just said, such as the particular man who feels closely affiliated to the church. I don’t think he comes to the services and events but his wife is probably buried here somewhere and he likes to think about her by coming into the church.”

David Atherton
PCC Secretary

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