

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

HOLY TRINITY HILDERSHAM

Text, design, and 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**

*with the generous support of Allchurches Trust
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: View of the colourfully decorated Victorian chancel and the East window of Hildersham church.

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HOLY TRINITY HILDERSHAM

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Granta

Address: High Street, Hildersham,
Cambridge CB21 6BZ

Granta Vale group website:
Under construction



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade I listed building; Kitchen facilities in a meeting room in the west tower; North porch extension with facilities; Decorated and frescoed Victorian chancel; Original medieval tower ladder; 13th century Octagonal font; Medieval brasses; Victorian open-back wooden pews; Fine William Hill organ dated 1900

Congregation to Population Ratio: 20 / 206

Fundraising: Hildersham Lectures project; Country fair; Rolling supper; Gift day; Quiz nights; Concerts; Outdoor Theatre productions

Income Generation: Regular giving

Communications: Group benefice newsletter; Church news page in *Abington and Hildersham News*; Visitors' book; Booklets; Annual publication 'A Year in Hildersham Church'

Community Engagement: Community questionnaire; Café Church and outdoor variants of Mossy Church and Sweaty Church; Home group; Children's Church Council; Church library; Village tea; Foodbank; Emmaus collection; Arts Festival; Heritage Day.

ROOTS



Profile

The small village of Hildersham is located eight miles to the south-east of Cambridge between the larger villages of Linton and Great Abington just off the major road A1307. The village sits on a gentle rise above the tributary of the River Cam known locally as the River Granta. The parish boundary extends from the Roman Road, known in medieval times as Wool Street, north of the village, to the border with Essex to the south. In previous centuries, the parish population had declined to as few as 20 residents, due to emigration and rural poverty. In the 2011 census, the parish had a population of 211 in 90 households.

Hildersham has good transport infrastructure – the village sits just to the south-east of the Four Went Ways junction of the A11 road, allowing access to the A14 and the M11 roads. There are three science parks in the area – Granta Park, Babraham Park, and the Wellcome Genome Campus. The parish is known for gently wooded valleys and open fields.

Hildersham was featured in the Domesday Book of 1086 as a village for 16 villeins (tied tenants) and four slaves. What is notable is that no church and no priest are mentioned (which they often are in other villages), suggesting there may not have been a church here in 1086. There was, however, a mill and woodland grazing for pigs – both valuable assets.

A chapel established for dissenting worshippers had closed by 1877. The only school in the village closed in 1928 and the last of the shops closed in the 1960s. The former public house has been re-named and acts as both public house and restaurant with bed and breakfast facilities. The nearest churches are located in the Great and Little Abingtons and Linton villages (*See REACH Ely case studies of Linton and Great Abington*). There is a village hall, a prefabricated former hospital building moved there after the First World War, which can accommodate up to 80 people. At present, there is no industry of any kind in the village, but sheep farming plays a significant part in village life.

The parish church of Holy Trinity is featured in Simon Jenkin's book *England's Thousand Best Churches* (2002).



Clockwise: North-eastern side of the church building; South entrance to the church; North porch extension; Open door to the north porch.



Building

The church of Holy Trinity is a Grade I listed building, sitting to the north west of the High Street and to the east of Alder Carr, a 6.7 hectare wooded Site of Scientific Interest. Dating from the 12th century, the church is built of field stone with ashlar dressings and consists of a chancel with a south chapel and north sacristy. The nave, in Decorated style, is very short with two bays of aisles with a south porch and a west tower. The vaulted sacristy and the west tower date from the early 13th century. The tower is divided inside from the nave by two low arches.

Screens between the chancel and the south chapel and nave were removed during the Victorian restoration, when the roof was entirely renewed. The aisle windows have simple decorated tracery and may be contemporary with the south chapel built by William le Busteler, Lord of the Manor (1321–32).

The most recent renovations in 2015 supplied water and drainage to the church, providing hot and cold water to the kitchen in the west tower and an accessible lavatory within a newly built north porch. The room in the west tower where the kitchen is set is named the Margaret Bate Room in memory of a much-loved member of the congregation. The Victorian wall paintings were stabilised in 2019 but will need further restoration. The wooden pews in the church are lightweight with open back and are easy to move or pushed back against the walls to provide space for Café Church services, baptisms, and community events.

The building can accommodate 90 people. Holy Trinity Hildersham is open from early morning and closes at dusk. It can be accessed in the evening on request.

Above, clockwise: Seating arrangement in the nave; Bookshelf and south entrance door; Tower room with kitchen; The font and entrance to Tower room. Opposite page: View of decorated Victorian chancel and East window.





Artefacts

An archaeological survey in 2015 prior to building the north porch extension discovered evidence of an Anglo-Saxon burial ground dated to around 900 AD. Complete excavations revealed 32 graves, transforming Hildersham's understanding of its past.

The church has a colourfully decorated Victorian chancel frescoed throughout in dark reds, greens and gold. A thorough restoration was performed in the 1970s. The interior is lit by vividly coloured Victorian stained glass.

The chancel also contains brasses with effigies ascribed to members of the Parys family. A tomb-slab carved with a cross lies under an ogee-headed recess in the north wall of the chancel, where Robert Parys's brass once lay. A further brass dating to about 1530 shows a skeleton wrapped in a shroud. The octagonal 13th-century font rests on five columns and has trefoiled canopies on each face.

Hildersham church used to house a pair of 14th-century wooden effigies thought to represent William Busteler (died c. 1334) and his wife, but these were stolen in 1977.

Above, clockwise: Medieval brasses with effigies in the chancel. Opposite page: View of the chancel, brasses, and East window.





Top: Candlelit service of Nine Lessons and Carols; Middle: The Children's Church Council meeting in the church; Tea and cake preparation in the Tower room. Bottom: Getting ready to stir the community Christmas cake in the Village Hall during Creative Cafe Church; Barn dance (Photos by Hildersham church).

RUNNING

Team

Holy Trinity church is a member of the benefice known as the Granta Vale Group. This includes parishes of Hildersham, Great and Little Abington, Balsham, Weston Colville, West Wickham, and West Wrattling.

The ministry team of Holy Trinity church includes the Rector of the Granta Vale Group, a Pioneer Minister, an Associate Priest, two Licenced and two Authorised Lay Ministers. The church has no church wardens at present; church affairs are conducted by the PCC.

Parish Nurse. Since January 2016, following extensive fundraisng, the combined parishes have funded the employment of a parish nurse with Hildersham PCC as the named employer. The Parish Nurse works in an honorary capacity with the Granta Medical practice in Linton, the first known instance of a parish nurse working with the NHS. Following the initial three year phase, further grant applications were successful and have enabled the Parish Nurse Management Group to widen the scope of the work. The Parish Nurse Plus scheme is an extension of the project engaging two community workers and establishing the Granta Vale Community Hub.

Religious Services

On the first Sunday of the month, there is a united service at Balsham church at 10.30 a.m. with a congregation of about 100 people. This service has been well received with the Hildersham congregation travelling to Balsham, enjoying the opportunity to meet with other parishes. On the second Sunday, Hildersham church holds a Holy Communion service at 9.15 a.m. The third Sunday afternoon at 4 p.m. is dedicated to Café Church. A service of Evensong is held on the fourth Sunday. Morning Worship or Holy Communion services are held on the fifth Sunday at 9.15 a.m.

In 2018, there were 37 parishioners on the church Electoral Roll, nine non-residents within the parish. Average attendance at Café Church was 16 adults and 7 children. This represents 11.5% of the village population. Overall, in Hildersham the percentage of regular church attendees in relation to the parish population (9.7%) is greater than in many larger churches.

Hildersham church has held services in a variety of locations, such as the Old School Wood, the village green, the river, a Victorian barn, a yurt, and tepees on the recreation ground: *'Anywhere where it's possible to stand and be public, we have had a service'*, adds Ms Myer, former churchwarden.

Parish Share

The Parish share for Hildersham Church in 2018 was £10,234.

Fundraising

The recent renovations were funded by a project entitled '**It's Our Turn Now**', which was launched with three lectures about conservation, the purpose of the church, and the vision for the church. Non-churchgoers contributed to the fund along with members of the congregation. Regular donations were made over three years and successful grant applications were made to the Cambridge Community Foundation, Garfield and Weston, Allchurches Trust, National Churches Trust, and Cambridge Historic Churches Trust.

Lamb Sunday is a new tradition in Hildersham; visitors spend a few hours mingling with and feeding new lambs in the Lambing Sheds and enjoying tea and cake served from the trailer. The funds raised are donated to the church.

The Hildersham Lectures are organised almost every month, the main purpose of which is community engagement, but the lectures do raise significant funds (*See Events*).

Country Fair was held in the grounds of Hildersham Hall in June 2019. This event was successful both in raising significant funds for the church but also in community engagement.

Rolling Supper (different courses of meal at different venues) and **The Pie and Fizz Quiz** in the village hall also contributed major amounts to funds.

Gift Day, held in the village hall, at which villagers were invited to have tea and cake and support the church, raised £2,000.

Concerts are held from time to time, including a recent violin recital. These can raise significant funds.

Outdoor theatre. 'The Outdoor Theatre Company' is an amateur dramatic company based in Haverhill that performed a production of a play by Shakespeare annually in the Old School Wood adjacent to the church. Raised funds contributed to the church.



1st row: Apple juice pressing in the churchyard; Swing bars bought with funds raised by the Children's Church Council with support from the Parish Council.
 2nd row: Ballroom dancing by Strictly Dance professionals at the Arts Festival; Printmaking workshop, Creative Cafe Church, making Christmas cards.
 3rd row: Scootathlon event; Making ceramic lanterns during Creative Cafe Church in the village hall.
 4th row: Caribbean Picnic raising funds for the North porch extension; Taming of Shrew (Photos by Hildersham church).

Income Generation

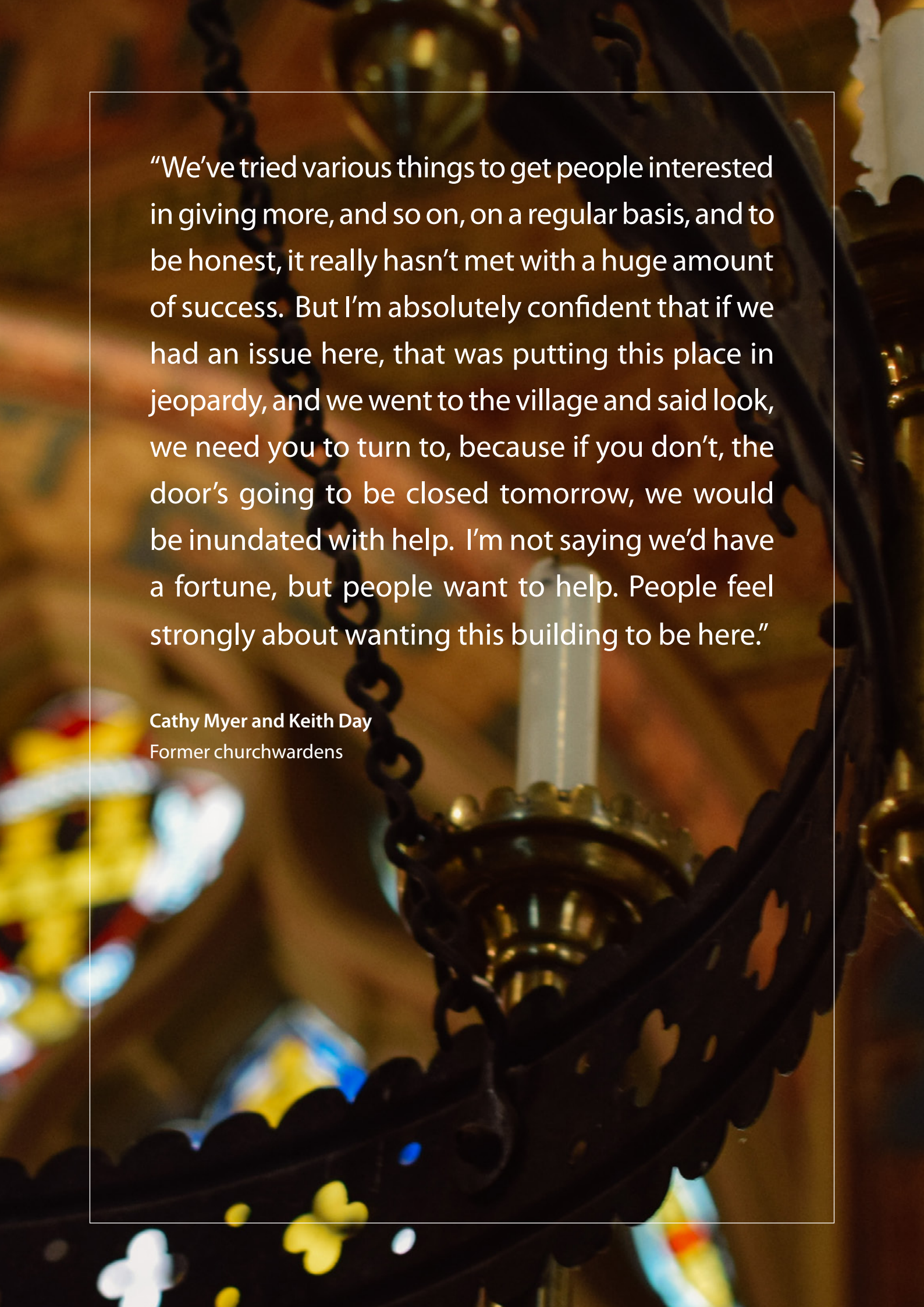
Regular giving. The church had received generous amounts in previous years, but that has begun to diminish.

Rental income. The church has not been rented out to external groups, although this has not been ruled out.

Communications

Holy Trinity church has no individual website. A new **website** will be developed for all the churches in the Granta Vale Group. There is a **joint newsletter** for all the parishes in the benefice. The church has a page in a **monthly newsletter** *Abington and Hildersham News*, and posts church news on the village noticeboard. A **visitors' book** is provided in the church and a visitors' guide is available, which includes church history and information for newcomers to the village. A **booklet** 'The Painted Chancel' is on sale to visitors. There is also a **booklet** entitled 'Welcome to Hildersham Church'. An **annual booklet** entitled 'A Year in Hildersham Church' is distributed to every resident, thanking them for their support and giving an overview of church activities.

A **questionnaire** was circulated in 2010 asking the community how they would like to see the church used. The response suggested villagers would like the church to be more accessible and available for more activities. This gave impetus to the project to build the north porch extension with facilities and the consequent provision of more community activities within the church.



“We’ve tried various things to get people interested in giving more, and so on, on a regular basis, and to be honest, it really hasn’t met with a huge amount of success. But I’m absolutely confident that if we had an issue here, that was putting this place in jeopardy, and we went to the village and said look, we need you to turn to, because if you don’t, the door’s going to be closed tomorrow, we would be inundated with help. I’m not saying we’d have a fortune, but people want to help. People feel strongly about wanting this building to be here.”

Cathy Myer and Keith Day
Former churchwardens

REACH

Community

Café church developed from the family service and takes place on a Sunday afternoon. Café Church is an informal café style service with tea and cakes served, and pews moved to create a central space. Café Church is led by a team and welcomes all age ranges and non-worshippers. There are a number of variants of Café Church: Sweaty Church, Creative Church, Mossy Church. **Sweaty church** involved a 'Scootathon' through the village culminating in a service in the Village Hall and a Treasure Trail around the village leading to a solution in the church itself.

Creative café church is held annually in the village hall when adults and children engage in a range of activities, such as printmaking, ceramics, and book-making. Items are sold in aid of a charity. The activity is concluded by a service to celebrate creativity.

Seven churches choir. There is a united benefice choir with members from all parishes in the Granta Vale Group, under the direction of a choir master, meeting weekly at Holy Trinity Hildersham. The choir sings at United Services and at special services throughout the year.

Home group. This consists of a group of 12 people who meet in each other's homes for Bible study and prayer. It has been established for 15 years.

Children's Church Council. This group has been established for eight years to provide a voice for children in the village. The group comprises young people aged from 7 to 14 years old who meet monthly in the church. The Council has multi-purpose: to bring together the children in the village by organising special events; to raise money for good causes; to provide a learning environment for children to take on new roles and responsibilities such as chair and secretary; to make church fun and to ask questions of the Rector. The group contributes to café church and to the Christmas carol service. Not all the children involved attend church regularly, but some are now beginning to attend occasional services.

Church library. This has been developed over the years. The collection of illustrated children's books is substantial, and the adult library has increased its collection of books to support those who lead prayers of intercession or who wish to find a resource for personal prayer.

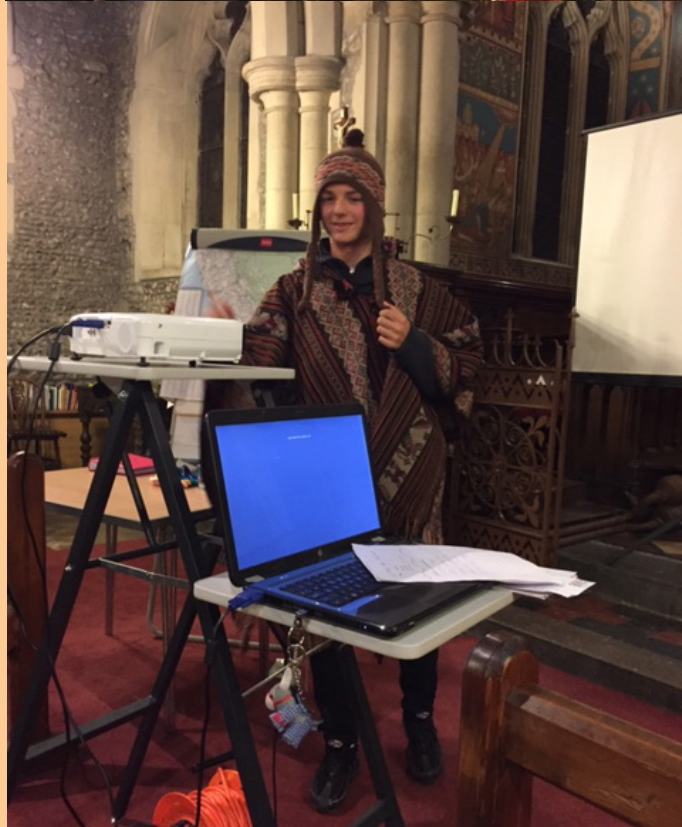
Silent prayer. The church holds a service every Tuesday evening for a time of silent prayer, followed by Compline. This service is lay led.

Emmaus collection. Two collections of good but unwanted household goods and clothing are made annually to support the work of Emmaus, an organisation supporting those who find themselves homeless.

Foodbank. The church supports the work of REACH, a charity in Haverhill supporting those in financial difficulties, with an on-going collection of non-perishable food for the Foodbank.

“Has [the renovation] made it a big change in terms of people using the building? I think we would say yes, it's made a huge change, right across the spectrum, from community events to individuals bringing friends or coming themselves, to sit quietly in the church.”

Keith Day
Former churchwarden



Clockwise from top: Lamb Sunday; Sheep-shearing demonstration by local shepherd Andrew Rouse held as a Hildersham lecture in the church car park; Lamb Sunday; Stirring the community Christmas cake; Hildersham resident Sam Logan gives a talk in the church on his four-week volunteering trip to Peru and taking part in sustainable projects; Apple juice tasting in the churchyard (Photos by Hildersham church).

Events

Outspoken Theatre Company. This company performs one of Shakespeare's plays annually in churches, open spaces and public houses, giving performances of exceptional quality. This is an event anticipated with great pleasure. Theatrical performances take place on a warm summer evening and include picnics on grass. Only once has the performance moved into the church because of inclement weather and the church provided an excellent theatre in the round.

Hildersham Lectures. These are held almost every month and cover a variety of topics, from volunteering overseas to the work of a local shepherd to tales of espionage.

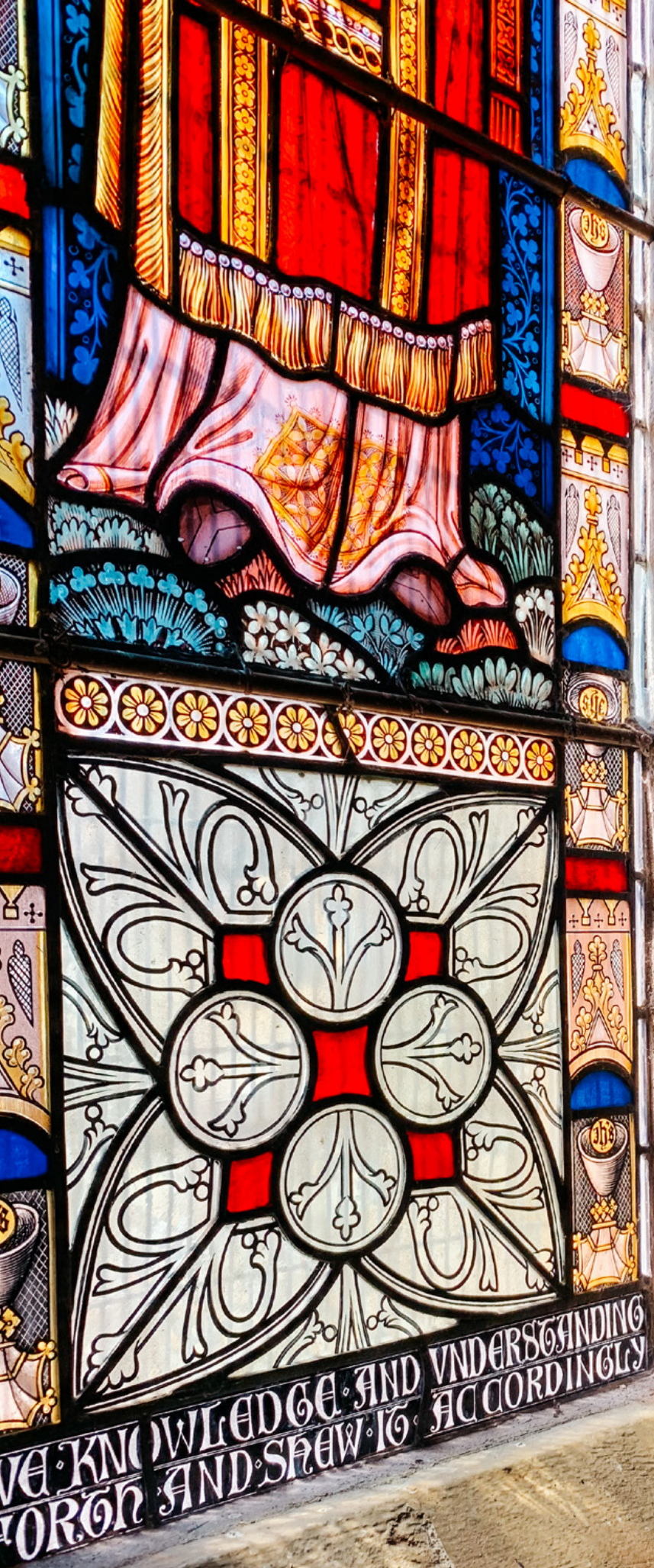
It's Tea-Time. The seasonal village tea is run by the church and organised in the village hall. It brings together friends from Hildersham, Linton, and the Abingdons. The event is open to all. Children pop in after school and enjoy playing in the playground as well as helping to serve those taking tea.

Other events. Since the facilities have been open, the church has hosted a number of community events such as primary school visits, and regular history and art group visits. To open the space for an Arts Festival, including a ballroom dance display, the pews were stacked against walls and works of art were presented on display stands.

Engagement

Holy Trinity church has been made accessible to as many people as possible. Events such as café church and the children's church council have encouraged new worshippers to join the congregation and to feel as if they are making a contribution. Non-worshippers or those from other faiths are made welcome. Services have been held in a variety of locations, indoors and outdoors, to attract new worshippers.

Community survey. In 2010, Hildersham church surveyed community interest in the use of the church and future improvements. The principal message received from the residents was that there would be a strength of will behind developing accessible facilities in the church and opening it up to more activities.



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REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Income generation

The church has recently completed a major building project and funding the Parish Nurse Project. It will take time to build up its financial resources again.

Asset management

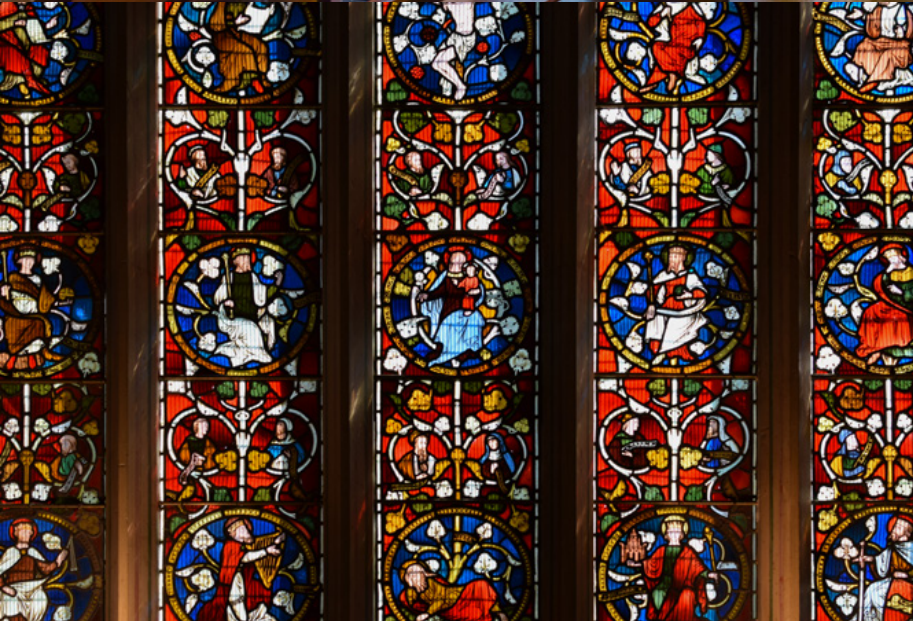
The Victorian wall paintings are in need of on-going renovation. Improvements are required in terms of lighting, particularly to the chancel and a sound system, mainly for outside speakers. These are expensive undertakings. There is currently no loop system for the hard of hearing.

Small size of congregation

Despite the greater percentage of church attendees (9.7%) than in many larger churches, as a small church set in a small village, Holy Trinity is unable to attract larger congregation or significant donations. It is too small to run a Sunday School, for example. Events are run by small teams of people.

Church location

The nearest primary school is in Great Abington and although the school has visited the church on a number of occasions it is not an easy undertaking to cross the busy main road to do so.



“However much you change the language to make it more accessible, make the music more jolly, whatever you do, it [the church] is still alien. The thing that’s not alien is the person who stands at the door and says hello, it’s lovely to see you.”

Cathy Myer
Former churchwarden

Lessons Learned

To work in partnership

Given the small size of the community, Holy Trinity relies on the united benefice for some of its mission. Examples include the seven churches choir and the Parish Nurse Project.

To create a living church

Exhibitions, lectures, the café church and concerts are some of the events used to attract non-worshippers into the church. The community questionnaire demonstrated that the village would like more opportunities to use the church building and was acted upon with significant effect.

To increase opportunities for further church and community integration

The village tea welcomes all residents. Services have been held in open spaces and other buildings, taking the church out to the community. In 2019 the church held a lantern-lit Advent Pilgrimage walking through the village. It is hoped this will be established as an annual event.

To adapt the church building for more flexible and a wider use

The addition of WC facilities has made the church much more accessible for visitors and those attending occasional services, such as weddings and funerals. A new sound system and lighting will improve the facilities further. A loop system for the hard of hearing is required.

To be open to people who might feel overwhelmed or intimidated by the church

The church team is alert to the fact that some people might feel wary of taking the first step of entering the church. The sidesman is seen as having an important role in welcoming visitors.



“My aspiration would be that the church continues to grow slowly, to be a place where everybody in the village chooses to come for a variety of reasons... I’ll put it in very few words, I said when we were looking at developing this building, that it should not be a Sunday museum... and I hope that we have continued on that journey.”

Keith Day
Former churchwarden

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