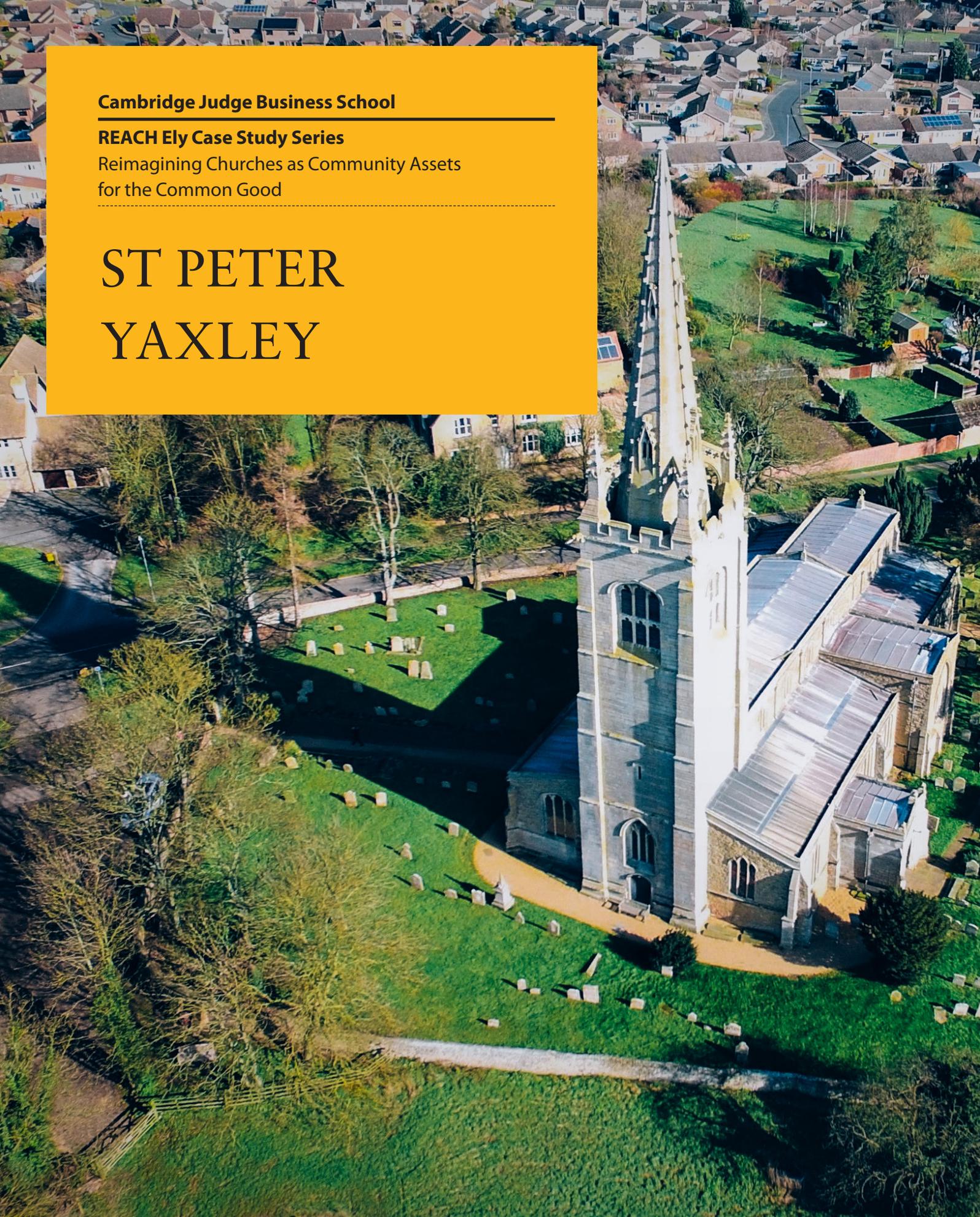


Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ST PETER YAXLEY



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: Aerial photo supplied courtesy of Simon White of High Exposure, www.high-exposure.co.uk

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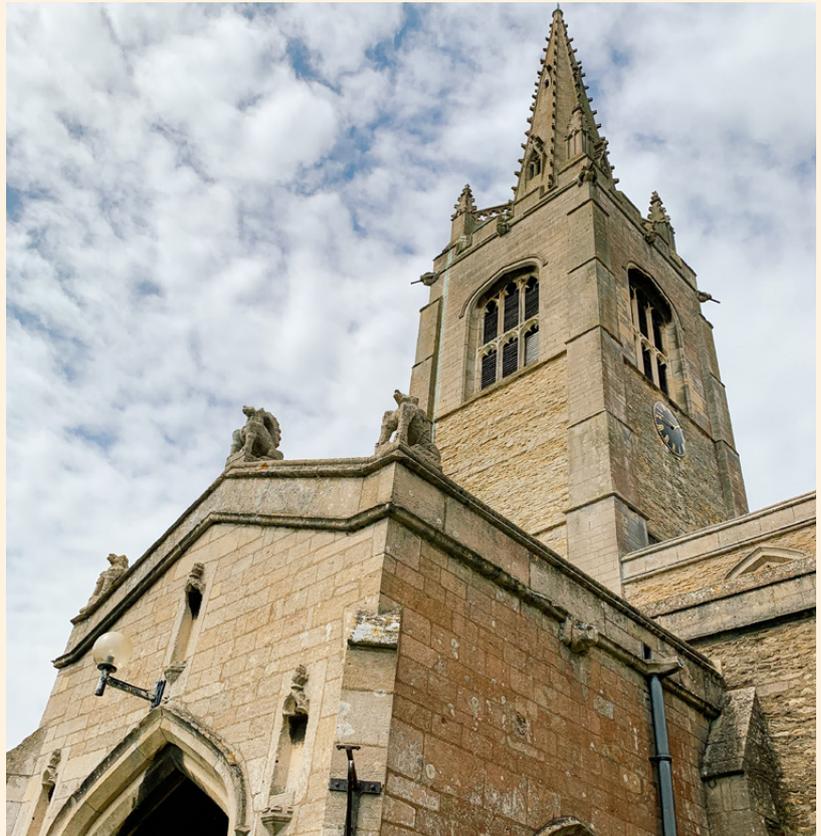
ST PETER YAXLEY

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Yaxley

Address: 43 Church Street, Yaxley,
Peterborough PE7 3LH

Website: www.saintpeters.co.uk



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade I listed building; Medieval rood screen; Two upstairs rooms; Crèche; Arts and crafts wooden pews; Kitchen and facilities; Paintings; Remains of wall paintings; Wooden box (previously containing the heart of William de Yaxley, Abbot of Thorney); Medieval brass and an effigy; Memorial ledger stones; Belfry with six bells

Congregation to Population Ratio: 147 / 9,390

Fundraising: Ad-hoc fundraising campaigns; Grants and donations; Overseas church

Income Generation: Regular giving; Annual Strawberry Tea; Annual plant sale; Rentals

Communications: Website; Facebook pages; Instagram account; YouTube channel; Weekly e-newsletter; Monthly prayer diaries and monthly news (available in paper version, but primarily electronic); WhatsApp groups; TV and pull-down screens in the church; Fence banner; Noticeboards

Community Engagement: Community Sunday; Community Care Programme; Yaxley Food Bank; Winter Night Shelter; Sparks; Mothers' Union; Youth group; Encounter group; Signed services for the deaf; Impaired senses group; Bible studies group; Green Day; Strawberry Tea; Concerts; Beer and Carols at local public house; Christmas Fair; Bell ringing team; Church and community building in Rwanda.

ROOTS



Profile

Yaxley is said to be one of the largest villages in England (population 9,390 according to 2011 census), sitting approximately four miles (6 km) south of the cathedral city of Peterborough. The village is located on the boundary of the developing Hampton township. Yaxley is served by the A1 road to the west and is separated from Peterborough by the A1139 (Fletton Parkway) to the north. Despite its proximity to Peterborough, Yaxley is an isolated and separate settlement. There are no other built up villages and towns in Huntingdonshire nearby. The nearest railway station is at Peterborough, some six miles away.

The parish of Yaxley extends to some 3,296 acres. Yaxley once belonged to the Abbey of Thorney, and at one time had a weekly market and an annual fair. There was once a mere on this spot called Yaxley Mere and a navigable waterway between Yaxley, Holme and onwards to the sea at King's Lynn. The nearby hamlet of Norman Cross is thought to have been the meeting place of the Hundred Court, possibly formerly marked by a large stone or cross, but there is no record of this, and the name seems to derive from the crossroads rather than from any structural cross. The site appears to have been devoid of buildings until 1797, when a great military prison was erected here for the accommodation of prisoners captured during the Napoleonic Wars. The prison was pulled down in 1816.

Village amenities include four village halls run by the Parish Council and two family-run halls that are available for hire, three primary schools, a healthcare centre, a small industrial estate, and numerous clubs, including such as the British Legion and Royal Air Force Club. There is a library with meeting space for hire. Yaxley has a non-league football club, Yaxley FC, and ten football pitches.

The village lacks a natural centre – there are no main square or common. A small shopping centre area does exist. Perhaps because of the geographical position described above, Yaxley has expanded without a central plan to manage its growth and is somewhat separated into two by the main road through the village (the Broadway). On either side of this road are two sides of Yaxley – Old (south) and New (north) Yaxley.

Besides the parish church of St Peter, Yaxley has a Methodist Chapel in Main Street. In the past, the village also had a Catholic church and Wesleyan, Congregationalist, and Baptist chapels.



Top: St Peter's churchyard surrounded by the fence. Middle: View of the church building from the east; The south side of the church with the tower. Bottom: Footpath towards the south porch; North entrance gates and church noticeboard.



Building

The church of St Peter is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086. It is a large cruciform edifice of the Decorated Style, with some elements of the late Perpendicular. Both the nave and chancel have clerestories. There are aisles, southern porch and a western embattled tower airy flying buttresses supporting the octagonal recessed crocketed spire. The walls of the porch, the east wall of the chancel and parts of the tower are faced with ashlar, and those of the rest of the church are coursed rubble. It is a Grade I listed building, featured in *England's Thousand Best Churches* by Simon Jenkins (2012).

Because of strict building regulations and planning constraints, the outside of the church maintains the finish that it had from about 15-16th centuries. 'It's a time capsule on the outside', says Paul Russell, churchwarden. The windows have different styles of 14-15th century tracery. Externally the chancel has a low-pitched gable with a plain parapet and is flanked by two late 14th-century buttresses with gabled tops.

The church contains a rare, intact set of arts and crafts wooden pews. It can comfortably accommodate up to 250 people without the use of additional seating. Seating has been added in the South transept – utilising

pews removed from the central aisle to create a dais. Up to 450 people may attend Christmas services, when there is standing room only. Screens and speakers have been discretely positioned to relay the service to worshippers at the rear and sides of the church. A small TV panel is temporarily attached to the medieval rood screen, and a pull-down projector screen is used for Evening Praise in the South Chapel.

A significant renovation was undertaken in the early 1900s but little more was done until the late 1990s, with the addition of a lavatory, a servery, and an upstairs room and later developments included the introduction of a dais (along with sound system and screens) and most recently with the rewiring/redecoration of the building. Two large industrial gas boilers are used to heat the space. The lead roof has minor leaks and up to £2,000 is spent annually to maintain it. The font was moved to a more central position during the works in the late 1990s.

St Peter Yaxley is located on the south-western boundary of the village. It is surrounded by a churchyard, maintained by the Parish Council because it is no longer in use save for the burial of ashes. The church is open from 10.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. from Monday to Friday by volunteers throughout the summer months.



Above clockwise: Rood screen; Pews in the South aisle; Space near the West tower; Sitting arrangement in the South chapel.

Opposite page: View from the nave towards the chancel.

Artefacts

Inside the church, the west wall of the nave has a 17th-century painting with Prince of Wales's feathers and motto within a garter surmounted by a crown, figures of a man in Roman armour, another in a long cloak, a gravedigger, and a skeleton, with texts. Several wall paintings include 14th-century scenes from the Resurrection and remains of floral decoration. Glass in the chancel window is by Sir Ninian Comper (1947, his strawberry symbol in one corner).

The north chapel has the matrix of a 14th-century brass with foliated cross having demi-figure of a priest in the head, and a marginal inscription. In the north wall of the north transept, there is a projecting stone with sunk panel having a pointed top and two arms holding a heart; a cylindrical wooden box

containing a heart was found behind this stone in 1842, and is now preserved in a modern recess near it. The heart is believed to have been that of William de Yaxley, Abbot of Thorney, who was vicar here in the 12th century.

The north aisle contains two loose fragments of a late 13th-century effigy of a priest in mass-vestments. The late 13th-century font has an octagonal bowl with square sunk panels and a hollow-chamfered under edge, on a modern circular stem with moulded capital and base. The gable-ends of the side chapels have carved animals at the corners: a collared bear on the north and a crocodile on the south. There are many 18th and 19th century memorial ledger stones. The church plate includes an engraved chalice and alms-plate. The belfry houses six bells.

RUNNING

Team

St Peter's has a vicar and employs one paid official, a part-time communications officer. There are two churchwardens, a weddings administrator, a baptisms administrator, a licensed lay minister (LLM) and an LLM 'in training'. The church has an active PCC and many volunteers – along with authorised lay ministers, and several retired clergy – who run many groups and assist the vicar.

Religious Services

Regular services. On Sundays, St Peter's church holds a traditional service at 9 a.m. which attracts around 20 people. The band-led morning worship is offered at 11 a.m., which is supported by up to 160 people. The 7 p.m. Evening Praise service is on the first and third Sundays only and attracts about 25 people. Monthly the 11 a.m. service is signed for the deaf and hard of hearing.

Junior church is offered at the 11 a.m. service, except for the first Sunday of the month, which is an All Ages service. Junior church is divided into three groups: 'Bubbles', 'Splash' and 'Grid'. A creche is available at all services for children under threes.

St Peter's-on-tour. From January to March, if the church building is closed for any project work, the church goes on tour, setting up 11 a.m. services in schools or village halls. The church sometimes hosts services, such as weddings, for a neighbouring church, Christ The Servant King in Hampton.

Going online. During the coronavirus outbreak and the mandatory lockdown rules imposed by the UK government in March 2020 to protect the population, St Peter Yaxley was one of the first to try new things and use technology to support parishioners. The church shared St Peter's vicar's video where she encouraged people to keep in touch and communicate through different media, invited them to join in candle lighting and pray, and shared stories behind her home wall paintings. The church also now streams its 11 a.m. Sunday services.

Parish Share

In 2019, Ministry Share expenditure was £44,000.



Top three: Drum kit near the North transept; Seating arrangement in the South chapel; Children's corner and the pulpit.
 Middle: Upstairs room interiors. Bottom: WC and kitchen in the tower.

Fundraising

In its fundraising strategy, the church prefers specific fundraising campaigns instead of constantly asking in more general terms.

Grants. Fundraising is carried out and grants sought for major building projects, which are undertaken every ten years or so. A fundraising committee is often set up for these projects.

Gifts and donations. This provides regular contributions from many people who help to fund the church and its mission. Details of how to donate are provided on the website.

Overseas church. St Peter Yaxley has supported a church in Maseru, Lesotho, Southern Africa, and, currently, a church (and children) in Kabahire, Rwanda.

Income Generation

Annual Strawberry Tea event raises £2,000. The church has previously held a very successful auction of pledges.

Green Day is an annual plant sale event that attracts people from a wide area and can raise up to £4,000.

Donations are often made at the 'Beer and Carols' evening and the annual Christmas Fair.

Rentals. The church is available for hire although there are several village halls available to rent that offer a more flexible space.

Stewardship Sundays. Income/ expenditure is reported back to church members on Stewardship Sundays – an opportunity to update the congregation, every six months, whilst highlighting any shortfall in income that needs to be addressed.

Communications

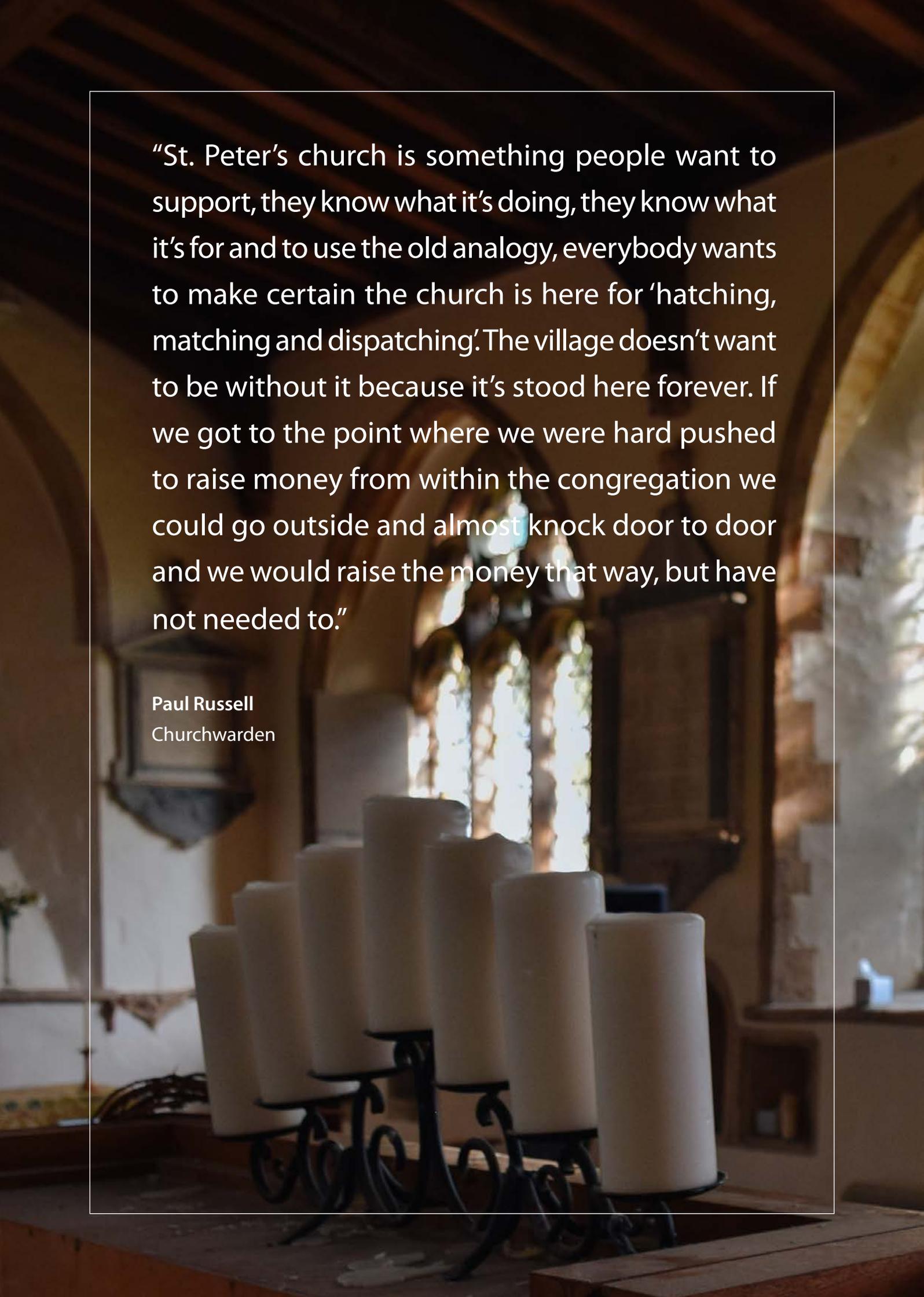
The church employs a part-time Communications Officer.

St Peter Yaxley has a **website**, which was recently shortlisted for a national prize.

The church also runs a **Facebook page**, an **Instagram account**, a **YouTube channel**, a weekly **e-newsletter**, monthly Prayer Diaries and monthly news (paper and electronic copies available), and a **private Facebook group** 'Community of St Peter's Church, Yaxley' with 305 members (April 2020).

There are **WhatsApp groups** for established home groups run by members of congregation.

Good use of technology is made within the church to project services to those sitting at the back and sides of the building, using five small **screens** and one large screen in the centre. A fence **banner** and **noticeboards** are displayed on the side of the church welcoming visitors. *'What the church must do, is to embrace all the technology so that it beeps in your pocket like a heartbeat, knowing you, letting you know it's still there'*, says Mr Russell.

A photograph of a church interior. In the foreground, a black wrought-iron candelabra holds several white candles. The background shows a stained glass window with colorful patterns, set within an arched opening. The lighting is warm and soft, creating a serene atmosphere.

“St. Peter’s church is something people want to support, they know what it’s doing, they know what it’s for and to use the old analogy, everybody wants to make certain the church is here for ‘hatching, matching and dispatching’. The village doesn’t want to be without it because it’s stood here forever. If we got to the point where we were hard pushed to raise money from within the congregation we could go outside and almost knock door to door and we would raise the money that way, but have not needed to.”

Paul Russell
Churchwarden

REACH

Community

Community Sunday. This is a whole-church activity that takes place on one Sunday in spring. Teams of 60-70 volunteers work on projects such as mowing the grass, picking up the litter, repairing roofs, helping local residents with gardening, or just talking to them, while others provide support with food and refreshments during the day.

Community Care Programme. Every month, members of the church community try to go out to help with various projects such as cleaning and painting, gardening and DIY. Some of the people helped are referred to the church by local organisations. They were also planning on a Community Prayer Day in 2020 but are now unsure if this will be able to proceed.

Anglican Church of Rwanda. As well as financially supporting their work – for example, helping to fund the build of St Peter’s church in Kabahire – St Peter Yaxley has sent teams from Yaxley out to Rwanda to provide physical and spiritual support.

Star School, Rwanda. Members of the church community support this school through child sponsorship.

“To me [Community Sunday] is our pop-up church because the main element of it is not to paint someone’s shed, put the new roof on, it’s to sit there and talk to them, and be there for them. To have someone to talk to and not to say, right, we’ll come and pick you up and bring you to church – no, we don’t do that. We take church to them and we work with them and they give us a cup of tea.”

Paul Russell
Churchwarden

Lesotho. The community built a church in Maseru, Lesotho and members of the congregation have paid visits to the church.

Sparks is a 'Parent, Carers and Children under 5' group that meets fortnightly on Friday mornings. It follows a themed programme for each session with craft, music, story-time, and refreshments.

Mothers' Union has regular meetings in the church.

Activity groups. St Peter's church accommodates several volunteer activity groups such as a bell ringing team led by a bell captain and a flower group that helps decorate the church with flower arrangements, amongst many others.

Youth group for 11-16 years old. It meets on Sundays during the 11.00 a.m. service and holds monthly evening meetings.

Small home groups of around 12 people meet weekly in peoples' homes around the village for social and pastoral support.

The Encounter group meets every other Friday, in church, for spiritual reflection.

The church has a very active **PCC** with a range of management skills.

Events

Green Day is an annual plant sale, held in the Spring. The plants are provided by three families in the church community. The event attracts large numbers of visitors from the village and further afield.

Strawberry Tea is held annually across two gardens in the village. This event has grown into a popular event and includes live music, raffles, refreshments and an evening service.

Concerts. The church is a convenient venue for concerts from time to time.

Beer and Carols. Members of the congregation (and band members) visit a local pub for carol singing. The event originated from past experience when a team of singers from St Peter's church performed carols in Peterborough town centre and received donations from the public, although the event was not planned to raise funds.

Christmas Fair is an annual event to raise funds and, more importantly, to welcome hundreds of visitors to the beautiful church whilst they do their Christmas shopping.

Stewardship Sunday. This event is used to report back on the church's finances.



A snapshot of life at St Peter's

Top row: Community Sunday. 2nd row: Junior Church and Signed Services. 3rd row: Band-led Worship and Mission partners.

Bottom row: Advent Wreath Making and Christmas Fayre (Photos by St Peter Yaxley).

Engagement

Move to a band-led style of worship. There have been several interregna/'vacancies' in the last 30 years, and the community has used these to experiment with new forms of worship and to create new spaces within the church. Twenty years ago, as the number of worshippers declined, the church set out to attract a younger audience: a band was formed and now plays regularly at the mid-morning/11 a.m. service. From a Sunday attendance of 50, 20 years ago, the Sunday services now attract up to 160 worshippers. The band has a regular weekly practice session and plays at events outside the usual services. The introduction of the band has enabled a more modern, family-friendly style of service.

Focus on families and younger people (plans for more family activities).

The mid-morning service attracts between 25 and 35 children, and three groups have been created for them as well as a creche for the toddlers. An all age service is held once a month to ensure that children feel a part of the wider church community.

Community volunteers. Members of the church regularly volunteer for the Community Care and the Yaxley Foodbank. Coordinators draw up rotas and asks for help where there are gaps in provision.

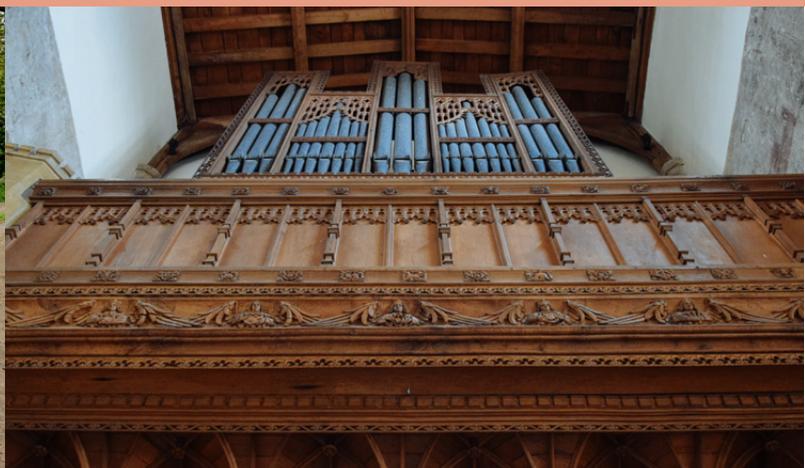
Foodbank. The Foodbank, a private initiative of St Peter Yaxley, is open at the church twice weekly. The church also works in partnership with Yaxley Parish Council, local schools, and other voluntary and statutory organisations in the wider Peterborough area to ensure local needs are met.

Collaboration with schools. The church holds assemblies in schools that use the church for their Easter and Christmas services and school performances. In addition, the church also has 'Lighthouse Club' – a lunchtime club held in the William de Yaxley Academy.

Interfaith activities. St Peter Yaxley has hosted speakers from other faiths and children have gone on trips to other places of worship.

“We have people that come into church to enjoy the church, the building, the history, but do not come to church... [and] people who support the church who are in the wider community, but do not wish to come in the door on a Sunday – they just want to make certain the church is here for generations to come. We have both of those. We have the casual visitors who are the ones carrying their book, *England's Thousand Best Churches* and it's like a pilgrimage almost. Some of them are going through ticking them off, others are just saying I'm in the area and I flicked it open and you're in it, so I'm coming to look at you, and you're open, praise the Lord.”

Paul Russell, Churchwarden



REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Creating space for a growing community

Freeing up space involves a constant juggling act as much of the floor space is taken up by pews. The church is currently working to raise funds for a new project – to create an upstairs space in the south aisle for activities, particularly for the children's groups. The vicar has enabled groups to meet in the vestry although it is too small for creative activities. There is only one lavatory and additional lavatories are included in the new project. There is no church hall and the land surrounding the church is not in St Peter's ownership. Noise levels from the creche can be sensitive for other church visitors, and the PCC hopes, in the future, to obtain permission to enclose either the south or north chapel to accommodate this and other groups.

Working with a listed building and its artefacts

The Grade I listing means that there are significant planning constraints and the community has had to be creative in finding ways to update its fixtures and fittings. The PCC has had to engage in prolonged negotiations with the planning authorities for changes affecting the fabric of the church, such as the colour of the flues emerging from the new gas boiler.

Coping with change

There was some resistance to the introduction of the new band-led style of worship. As a rule, the congregation has, however, tended to want services to evolve faster than some of the incumbents were prepared to accept. *'It was like turning a super tanker, it was very difficult to get it to start to turn, but when you've finally turned it and you are pointing where you want to go... it is worth all the effort,'* adds Mr Russell.

Running costs

Two large gas boilers are needed to heat the space, at a cost of around £20 per hour. The age of the stone floor means that underfloor heating is not possible. Insurance premiums are also high, hence opening hours are restricted to two hours per day. An application to install an additional door in the South Porch to make the church less draughty was rejected on planning grounds. The roof will need substantial repairs in the next 20 years.

Youth engagement

The introduction of the band brought a younger generation to the church but work is now needed to encourage the next generation, particularly students, to participate more fully in the community, volunteer for the welcome team at church services, and to take on leadership roles.



Top: Remains of wall paintings in the nave. Bottom: South aisle.

Lessons Learned

To listen to community

Not everyone was pleased with the new style 11 a.m. service. To balance the needs of all members of the community, the church has been able to maintain a traditional Holy Communion service at 9 a.m. every Sunday.

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

St Peter Yaxley is constantly seeking innovative ways to accommodate its growing congregation within the constraints of planning regulations.

To maintain and strengthen the connection with the worshipping community

The church is actively planning for the future with its focus on youth leadership and children's groups. The introduction of the band had been hugely successful in engaging a younger generation.

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

The Community Care Programme, along with the Home Group network, reaches out to people in the community who might not be able to or wish to attend a service.

To find cost-effective and innovative solutions

The church has a pro-active team and a PCC that brings many business skills to the management of the church. They are prepared to innovate to overcome the operational issues of running a well-used but ancient building, e.g. in the installation of screens. They are able to draw on traditional sources of finance but recognise that major fundraising projects should be well spaced out to avoid over-burdening the congregation.



“You step out in faith because you know people will want it to happen ... and it will happen. If you sit there and think, oh, well, I don't think it will, it won't. If you are confident and you have that belief on day one that you can move mountains, you can do anything.”

Paul Russell
Churchwarden

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