

**Cambridge Judge Business School**

**REACH Ely Case Study Series**

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# ST MARTIN CAMBRIDGE

*Text, design, photography*

**Dr Timur Alexandrov**

Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation  
Cambridge Judge Business School

**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.

*Editorial board*

**Dr Helen Haugh**

Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation  
Cambridge Judge Business School

**Geoffrey Hunter**

Diocese of Ely

*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](http://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](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: Interior of the west side of the church with the triangular window filled with colourful glass.*

Copyright © 2019 University of Cambridge. All rights reserved. The authors gratefully acknowledge financial support from The Ely Diocesan Board of Finance under research grant ref RG95970.

# ST MARTIN CAMBRIDGE

**Church Category:** Suburban

**Deanery:** Cambridge South

**Address:** 127 Suez Road, Cambridge  
CB1 3QD

**Website:** [www.stm.org.uk](http://www.stm.org.uk)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** St Martin's A-frame triangular interior design; St Thomas's Hall; Church Day Centre bus; Romsey Town Churches group

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 117 / 6,471

**Fundraising:** No specific fundraising events

**Income Generation:** Rentals of halls, dining rooms, and lounges; Individual giving

**Communications:** Website; Facebook page; Parish newsletter; Word of mouth

**Community Engagement:** Community groups Frame, Vista, Women and men breakfast groups; Cambridge Torch; Learning disabilities group; Bowls and arts group for seniors; Community survey; St Thomas's Hall; Day Centre; Care home.



# ROOTS

## Profile

---

St Martin's church is located in the south-east of the city of Cambridge, in the ward of Coleridge, one of fourteen Cambridge wards, with a population of 9,200 people (2018). This is a diverse, urban parish stretching from the busy railway station to the leafy streets of Cherry Hinton. The parish is adjacent to the larger Romsey Town area: the church belongs to the Romsey Town Churches group, holding fraternal meetings, united services termly, and works together on projects.

Coleridge ward has a mix of housing types and land uses, with leisure and industrial uses located on the western edge of the ward and some retail and industrial uses located on Cherry Hinton Road at the southern edge of the ward. A large housing estate was constructed in the area in the 1930s, and its location, to the east of the main railway line, left it cut off from the parish church of St Paul. The Vicar of St Paul's at that time, Mr Ainsley, had a vision for ministering to the people on this new estate and approached the Master and Fellows of Jesus College, who gave a parcel of land large enough to build a new church in what is now Suez Road. The church was housed in temporary buildings on that site until a new church was built in the 1960s.

The parish owns two buildings, St Martin's church, consecrated in 1961, and St Thomas's Hall in Ancaster Way, the latter being built in 1980 to accommodate a growing congregation, and to provide a centre for the community on the east side of Perne Road. There is also a privately-rented bungalow next to St Thomas's Hall. The parish runs a Day Centre for its elderly residents on the church premises. It also owns a bus that is used to transport frail and elderly parishioners to the Day Centre.

Ward amenities include Coleridge Community College, which is a secondary academy school with 600 places for children aged 11-16, and Ridgefield Primary School, and St Bede's Inter-hurch School, and parish shops but there is no community centre. There are several allotments and Coleridge Recreation Ground is used extensively by local residents, including many dog-walkers, people with young children and a number of sports teams. The ward is seen by the City Council as lacking publicly-accessible open spaces.







Top: St Martin's church on a winter day. Middle: Church's backyard garden and wheelchair accessible entrance to the Day Centre. Bottom: Wooden entrance doors to the church; St Thomas's Hall in Ancaster Way (Photos by St Martin Cambridge).

## Building

---

**St Martin's church building.** On the site of the present church, there was a Mission Hall built in 1932 with the uninspiring rectangular hall nicknamed the 'shoebox'. After the Second World War, funds were raised towards a proper church building, however, architectural plans were rejected because it was felt the new design was also a 'shoebox'. An alternative architectural plan was accepted in 1960. In 1961, the new church building dedicated to Martin of Tours was consecrated by the Bishop of Ely, and later an extension was added to accommodate the day centre, office, storage space and WC facilities. Prior to its consecration, services were held in various temporary buildings. The site contains a **Day Centre** and hall, a good-size kitchen and dining room and a Day Centre office. There is a large, quiet garden that can be used for fetes, children's parties and other gatherings. The former vicarage is now privately rented.

The church is dominated by the roof, which is extremely steeply pitched and covered with slate. The gable at the west end is also panelled with slate, save for a large triangular window in the apex which is filled with a tessellation of smaller triangles containing glass in varied shades of blue and green. A frosted glass clerestory is underneath the gables on the south side.

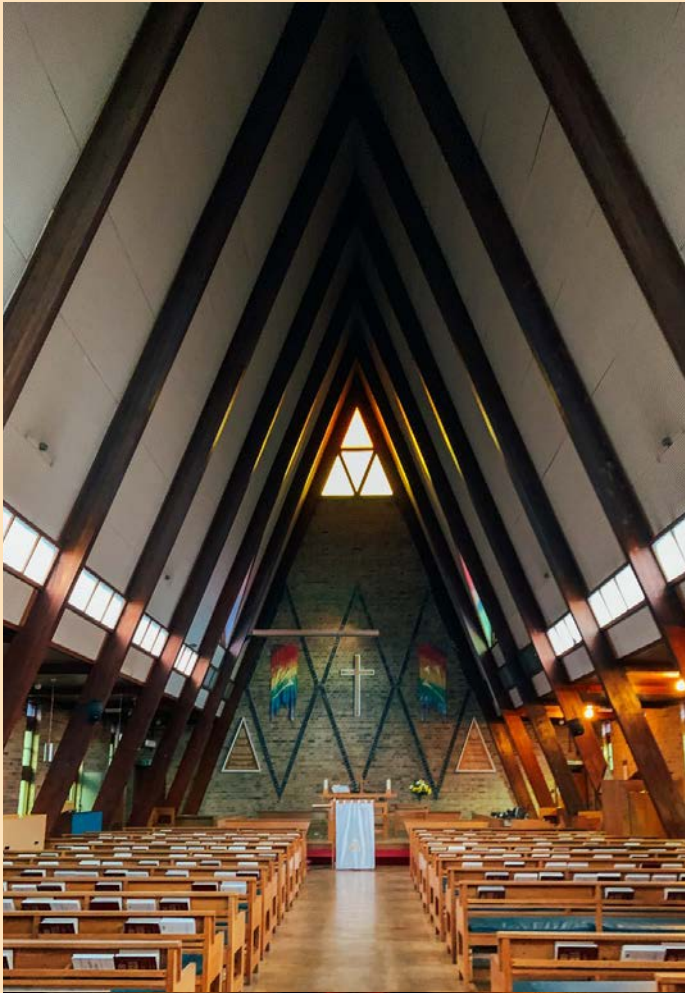
At present, St Martin's church building accommodates about 200 people. St Martin's has been exploring the

possibility of adding additional rooms to increase availability and flexibility at the church. The nave is filled with oak pews and more recent additions include twenty solar panels to the roof. A major redesign of St Martin's church hall was completed in recent years. However, it did not incorporate a second floor extension and redesign of the porch area to make the building more welcoming, something the PCC may revisit in the future. In recent years a projector was used to project songs onto a screen for children's services. In the last year a more powerful projector was purchased which improved the quality of the projection so it is now used to project songs during most services.

St Martin's currently has large wooden doors, but a glass entrance area would make it more accessible. *'The church doors are very solid, they look like a fortress not the modern building that invites people. People, in my understanding when I go to a public building, like to see glass doors, so they can see what's going on'*, adds the Revd Mr Roth. In 2019, the frosted glass panels next to the solid wooden door were replaced by clear glass as a step towards this goal. The church is open on weekdays to coincide with the running of the Day Centre.

**St Thomas's Hall.** In 1980, St Thomas's Hall was built in nearby Ancaster Way and part of the burgeoning St Martin's congregation was moved to establish it and fill the hall. Facilities include a large kitchen, a vestry and a small garden. The hall can seat up to 80 people and is a short walk from St Martin's church.





*Clockwise from top-left: Church's triangular nave; St Martin's facade in Suez Road; Day Centre hall; Day Centre kitchen; Church garden; High Altar with the window.*

# RUNNING

## Team

---

The ministry team of St Martin Cambridge includes the vicar, two churchwardens, a sexton, four licensed lay ministers, a church administrator, a centre manager, and a pioneer/outreach lay person in training. There are also a number of additional lay people who assist with leading church services or occasional talks. Cleaning, maintenance and the organising of groups are carried out by volunteers.

Since the beginning of 2019, two additional lay ministers are undergoing training. One of these is preparing for local contextual ordained ministry (LCOM), being licensed to perform all the duties of the priest on a voluntary basis but restricted to the local parish.

## Religious Services

---

Church services are held on Sundays at 10.30 a.m. at St Martin's church, and smaller and informal Sunday services are offered at St Thomas's Hall at 6.30 p.m. Holy Communion takes place on the fourth Sunday of the month at St Martin's and Holy Communion with prayer for healing on the second Sunday of the month at St Thomas's Hall. Morning prayer is offered on weekdays at 9.15 a.m. in the Quiet Room at St Martin's.

There are good neighbourly relationships with neighbouring parishes with St Martin's joining the annual St Philip's Alpha course (*See REACH Ely case study St Philip Cambridge*). Every year there are joint services held with other Romsey churches, such as St Philip's, Mill Road Baptist church and the Seven-day Adventist church which are preceded by a meal for those who join.

In 2018, St Martin Cambridge invited local Muslims to a Harvest Supper to strengthen neighbourly relationships.

Approximately 20 people regularly attend the services at St Thomas's Hall with a larger congregation at St Martin Cambridge (117 people), including families and senior citizens.





1st row: Carols by Candlelight at St Martin's; Church lunch in the dining room of St Martin's. 2nd row: A children's holiday club activity in St Martin's Hall; Harvest supper at St Martin's (pews re-arranged). 3rd row (Photos by Timur Alexandrov): Rearranged pews for children's playground; St Martin's cafe. 4th row: Church signposting; Lunchtime at the Day Centre (Photos by St Martin Cambridge).

### Parish Share

---

In 2019, parish share expenditure was £68,259.

### Fundraising

---

No specific fundraising is carried out. Events are typically arranged to raise awareness and to bring the community into the church rather than for income.

### Income Generation

---

**Rental income.** The church receives income from the hire of its halls, dining rooms, lounges, and the bungalow, which can be hired individually in each building. Discounted rates are offered to charity and community groups. The hiring of rooms raises approximately £20,000 per annum. The church also hires out a bungalow, which generates £14,000 per annum.

**Individual giving** raised £66,000 in 2019. Ten per cent of the church's income supports overseas missions as well as organisations providing services for the local community.

### Communications

---

The church has a well-developed **website** with information on the history of the church, facilities, acts of worship, user groups, the Day Centre and hiring charges. There is a contact form for enquiries. The church has a **Facebook page**, although it has not been updated for some time. A parish **newsletter** is delivered locally three times a year by church volunteers. **Word of mouth** is also seen as a useful way of encouraging new members.





*Top: A wedding reception in the main church (pews removed).  
Bottom: A charity's Christmas party held at St Martin's hall (Photos by St Martin Cambridge).*

# REACH

## Community

---

**St Thomas's Hall.** The Hall offers good facilities, a large kitchen and a small garden. It also has a storage room and two WCs plus a small side room, used as a vestry. The Hall has a car park for approximately 14 cars. The congregation consists largely of retired parishioners. As well as the regular, more informal Sunday services held here, the building is used by several groups and organisations including Fizzyfit keep fit sessions, Minders and Toddlers groups, Taxi Drivers Association, Ballet Classes, Keep Fit for Seniors, the Men's Breakfast, etc. The Hall is also available for children's parties and community events.

**Day Centre (St Martin's).** The Day Centre, located in the church, provides a much-needed outlet for older people at risk of social isolation in the community. The centre enables those who are becoming frail to stay longer in their own homes and, in some cases, allows carers to have a break for a few hours. It serves the area of Romsey, Coleridge, Queen Edith and Cherry Hinton. The aim is to provide a warm, welcoming and safe weekday facility and a place for companionship, support, a nutritious mid-day meal and daily activities. Activities are run from Monday to Friday throughout the year. Transport is provided using the church's own bus.

Activities include concerts, visits by local school choirs, development of art-based projects, carpet bowls, table-top games, quizzes and reminiscence. Occasions for services of Christian worship and prayer with and for people are provided.

The PCC-supervised service is run by a mixture of paid and volunteer staff. The church aims to enlist the help of the local Cambridge community to help provide value-added activities that add to the core services provided by their paid staff. The PCC determines the overall purpose of the Centre and appoints a voluntary Management Committee. Day to day work is overseen by a full time Centre Manager. The Centre produces an annual report.

In 2013, St Martin Day Centre's expenditure was around £115,000. Income to cover this came from a contract with Cambridgeshire County Council for places, from service users paying directly to attend, from grants from Cambridge City Council, Skills for Care, trusts and donations.



# St Martin's

"St Martin's Church is a very welcoming community. There will always be people that will show genuine interest in anyone who is new. I've been to other churches that are not like that – where everyone is minding their own business. Whilst there might be some people that prefer not being talked to – for some people that's really hard. That will not happen at St Martin's where many are determined to embody God's love and show a real interest in you as a person."

Revd Johannes Roth  
Vicar

**128 Suez Road.** Thirty-three years ago, St Martin Cambridge started up a care home at 128 Suez Road for people with learning disabilities. The building, situated in front of St Martin's, is no longer managed by the church but is still supported and encouraged by those attending the church.

The care home has a substantial group of Friends and Supporters headed up by a former mayor of Cambridge who support the home with a Christmas Show, summer garden parties and contact throughout the year, as well as visits to the home and a weekly gathering at Cherry Hinton to enjoy time with the residents.

“As a church we have agreed to have a policy for the use of our premises that is inclusive and promotes good relationships with the wider community. The ethos of the church (as a consecrated place of Christian worship) excludes use for any other religious ceremonies or events which are likely to be divisive to the local community, such as political rallies. However, we explicitly welcome people from all ethnic and religious backgrounds to use our premises for other social and community events, such as birthday parties or dance classes. So we’re not going to exclude someone because they’re from a certain background.”

Revd Johannes Roth  
Vicar



## Events

---

**Activities for wider communities.** The Dining room, the kitchen, and the St Martin's church building are offered for regular community group events such as arts and dance classes, pottery group, international lunch, and musical practice. Occasional events, such as the screening of the World Cup, are offered to the community.

On 11th November, the church in collaboration with a local school organises a **procession** on St Martin's Day, which includes costumes, lanterns, and St Martin songs.

## Engagement

---

**Youth work.** St Martin Cambridge was involved with other churches in setting up the Romsey Mill Community Centre, a community anchor organisation that has been providing work with different youth groups and their parents for the last 30 years (*See also REACH Ely case study: St Philip Cambridge*).

**Frame.** This is a group for people with restricted mobility following an accident, particular those who have to wear orthopaedic support. A number of churches use this group which offers community fellowship, allowing members to talk about their injury and support each other through their recovery period.

**Vista.** This is an international women's group aimed at women whose cultures discourage mixed-sex groups. Pre-school children are able to stay with their mothers and play with quiet toys during the activity which lasts about an hour. The group meets weekly and a list of discussion topics is available on the church website.



1st row: A painting activity at the Day Centre; St Martin's carpet bowls group. 2nd row: Croquet in the church garden (Day Centre); Craft activity in the Day Centre. 3rd row: Face painting in the church during a holiday club; Young people mingling in the kitchen and dining room. 4th row: St Martin's kitchen serving food for 'International lunch'; St Martin's meeting at St Thomas's Hall (Photos by St Martin Cambridge).



**Men's Breakfast Group.** The Men's Breakfast group normally meets on the second Saturday of the month, at St Thomas's Hall, and a list of speakers is published on the church website. Occasional day trips are arranged to places of interest (such as the War Cabinet rooms, Bletchley Park or even the Ypres battlefields) as well as evening specials (such as curry nights and film nights).

**Women's Breakfast Group.** This group meets once a month on a Saturday morning at St Martin's church. It provides an opportunity to relax and enjoy good company and conversation over a continental breakfast. A variety of speakers are arranged, ranging from a talk about personal faith, a Pilgrimage to Assisi, or the work of Jimmy's Nightshelter. There is also a joint family breakfast once a year.

**Cambridge Torch** offers a friendship group for the blind and visually impaired and meets at St Thomas's Hall on every second Saturday.

**Learning disabilities groups.** St Martin's church runs two groups catering for people with learning disabilities: Gateway monthly meetings and Causeway fortnightly meetings. Causeway is specifically for Christians with learning disabilities.

**Senior citizens.** St Martin Cambridge feels that there is room for greater provision for younger retirees. The bowls and art groups are very well supported but the attendees are predominantly in the senior age range.

**Community survey.** The church has considered an informal survey of residents in parts of the parish to explore what else it might offer to the community. The parish is too large to carry out a full survey and existing volunteers are already committed to multiple tasks, e.g., cleaning, running groups, contributing to services etc. This idea was previously discussed at a Youth Mission.

# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

---

### Church hall location

St Thomas' Road Play Area is situated to the rear of housing off St Thomas Road. The condition of this site is poor, with some evidence of anti-social behaviour. The ward is seen by the City Council as lacking publicly-accessible open spaces.

### Ageing congregation

St Thomas's Hall in particular attracts a more elderly group of worshippers. The congregation at St Martin's church is more diverse in terms of age, cultural background and employment status. Attendees at the Day Centre are increasingly frail and elderly and St Martin Cambridge is looking both to expand numbers and to broaden the age range of this group.

### Space to increase income generation

Although additional rooms – and provision for storage have been added to both buildings, it is felt that these rooms are now almost at capacity in terms of church groups and private lettings. St Martin's church has a large garden that might be used for fetes and parties etc., but access is via the vicar's own garden, which is problematic. There is uneven paving and the garden is also used as emergency access for the adjacent school.

### Lack of personnel and volunteers

The current team of volunteers is stretched and it was felt that it would not be appropriate to ask them to take on extra tasks, e.g. management of the Facebook page and carrying out a local survey. The church would like to open a café at the front of the St Martin's site but a lack of volunteers prevents this.



### Church building condition

The roof of St Martin's church sometimes leaks and will need to be repaired within the next decade. The church would like to offer a more flexible space for events but the pews are heavy to move, limiting opportunities to organise regular events. The local community is generally open to change, should the church decide to replace the pews with stackable chairs.

St Martin's considered the installation of external WCs for users of the garden allotment, next to St Thomas's, following a proposal of the local council. However, this was judged to be difficult to maintain and a safety concern, as the building is not monitored during the week.

The installation of solar panels was done in a hurry to secure a time-limited subsidy and this led to problems and a great deal of time was spent rectifying these. Better planning is needed for future building maintenance and repairs.

### Layout

The front aspect of St Martin Cambridge is not seen as very welcoming and the church is considering an idea to replace this with a glass foyer. The kitchen obstructs the view of the entrance from the road, which discourages visitors who are not familiar with the church. The emergency exit from the hall is currently via the kitchen.

"It would be nice to be able to also address [the entrance] area and make it more up-to-date and welcoming as a space where people like to gather. At the moment it's just a throughput area. People go through it, they don't linger there but I think we could probably do something more with it."

**Revd Johannes Roth**  
Vicar

### Lessons Learned

---

#### **To be a 'church for all'**

PCC has decided for St Martin's to be a 'church for all', to explicitly ensure that people with disabilities are invited not only to participate but actively contribute to church services.

#### **To plan carefully for any future renovations and improvements**

The installation of the solar panels had been sub-contracted and the work was not satisfactory, which took a lot of time to resolve.

#### **To increase opportunities for further church and community integration**

St Martin's church offers a unique community space and needs to continue to encourage local people to use facilities it offers. The church has an outreach team that plans events with the aim of bringing the community into the church.

#### **To integrate the church and the community**

Word of mouth has proved effective in bringing new members to the church. There is a welcome team that is responsible for making new visitors feel part of the church community. The parish newsletter, delivered by volunteers, is published three times a year and helps to raise awareness. An informal survey may be carried out to identify the community's needs.

#### **To attract families and young people**

Recently, the church has found it more difficult to attract young people and families, given that the majority of parents now work. There is a community-run nursery, Caterpillars, and a Brownies group, although the numbers are low for the latter. However, the halls are busy with bookings and it might be difficult to increase provision here. The church had previously run a youth group and anticipates demand for a new group as the number of children attending services has grown.

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

The church is partially obscured by other buildings on the site and the wooden front doors may appear unwelcoming to newcomers. Ways of making the church more accessible are being explored, such as a glass foyer or community café.



**To work in partnership**

Approximately 12 clients attend the Day Centre but the church hopes to develop this further by exploring partnership activities with other agencies. They are developing a network of contacts and working relationships with other organisations. They will continue to develop appropriate ways of offering spiritual direction, encouragement and pastoral support to all coming to the Centre.

**To increase the number of volunteers working within the church**

A recent survey revealed that many of the members of the church volunteer and that they take on multiple tasks. Many of the volunteers are elderly. It is therefore difficult to ask them to take on further responsibility.

“People are very busy. The question maybe is, okay - if we want to reach out to our community and start something new for a different group of people then maybe we need to look at what we are doing at present and change the way we do things. People only have a limited capacity, so it’s a question of finding out what the community really needs and what we can offer and invest ourselves in as we are called out of the safety of our four walls.”

**Revd Johannes Roth**

Vicar







“As the parish church in this place I believe we are called to strengthen and support our community. The church has a really vital role in bringing community together and helping people to live together in peace. It is our faith that helps us to overcome barriers that would otherwise separate us and I think we have a really important role in modelling that actually. As a church we feel inspired by David Armstrong who was instrumental in helping to negotiate the Good Friday agreement whilst he was the vicar of St Martin’s.”

**Revd Johannes Roth**

Vicar

**REACH Ely: Reimagining Churches as  
Community Assets for the Common Good**

**Cambridge Centre for Social Innovation**

Cambridge Judge Business School  
University of Cambridge  
Trumpington Street  
Cambridge CB2 1AG  
socialinnovation@jbs.cam.ac.uk  
www.jbs.cam.ac.uk

**Diocese of Ely**

Ely Diocesan Office  
Bishop Woodford House  
Barton Road  
Ely CB7 4DX  
T: +44 (0) 1353 652701  
www.elydiocese.org

[www.reachely.org](http://www.reachely.org)