

# St James, West Hampstead Diocese of London



St. James is a Grade II listed church which through a reordering and a project involving partnerships with the Local Authority and the Post Office is now a hive of local activity and an ongoing place of worship. It includes a café and a children's soft play area.

## Introduction

**When news reached Father Andrew Foreshew-Cain in 2012, via his Twitter feed, that the local post office was to shut and needed a new home – the beginning of an exciting new era for St James', a Grade II listed Blomfield church in west London, began.**

St James is a huge, red brick, Early English style church built in 1885-1888 with a 5-bay aisled nave, lofty ceilings, chancel and north chapel. It was constructed following the opening of West Hampstead railway station in the 1870s to serve new estates being developed, and contains notable stained glass by Lavers, Barraud & Westlake ('Excellent, crisply drawn figures with jewelled background and intricate leading', says Pevsner) and several by Kempe, including the east and west windows, and the north chapel north windows.

Following Fr Andrew's (the vicar of St Mary's Kilburn and St James West Hampstead) enthusiastic response to the tweet, conversations began with the Post Office Network Transformation Team, the Diocese of London, architects (Caröe architects were appointed) and others, to identify how the post office could be run within the church with minimal impact on the historic building and wider gain for the community. Initial plans for a café, stationary shop and rental space developed and after careful consideration the idea of a children's soft play area (now called Hullabaloo) became a central part of the business plan as the main concept to drive footfall into the building and ensure commercial success.

The Church Buildings Council was consulted on proposals in March 2013, and responded with its' support for the scheme. The project moved quickly and the official opening of 'The Sherriff Centre' (so named for it's location on Sheriff Road) <http://www.thesherriffcentre.co.uk> took place on 1 August 2014, though the post office was open for business from July.





As part of the works, the church was made fully accessible, with a ramp and automatic doors at the main entrance. In addition to the three-counter post office (housed within an oak framed pod-type structure at the west end of the church), there is a card and gift shop with its shelving on castors (so the units can be wheeled out of the way for services), a florists, children's soft-play area (Hullabaloo) in the north aisle, and the café (The Sanctuary) in the south aisle. Informal café style seating with tables and chairs, and some sofas, is arranged towards the west end of the church, leaving seating for worship towards the east end of the nave. The chancel remains unchanged and as a focal point within the church.

The final cost of the project was approximately £600,000 with funds raised through grants from the Post Office and the Local Authority, and grant-funders including The Henry Smith Charity <http://www.henrysmithcharity.org.uk/> and Garfield Weston <http://www.garfieldweston.org/>, through parish savings and income, and through some generous private donors.



## How does it all work in practice?

Although Fr Andrew is also officially the Post-Master, a manager is employed to run each of the businesses (the Post Office and the Sanctuary Café/Hullabaloo) within the church. Professional staff are employed in the Post Office and Café and further staff and volunteers are responsible for the children's play centre. In order to ensure that the PCC is not financially responsible in the scenario that any of these should fail they are each run as separate companies. The Sheriff Centre, which together they form, is in itself a separately registered charity, meaning that any profits made can be gift-aided and these will then be put back into charitable causes and the church's outreach work.

## 3 months in – what's happening?



The centre has been up and running for around 3 months and it has already made a profit. The church is busy throughout the day with home-workers making the most of free wifi and good coffee, and the space is buzzing with young mums and their children. The soft play area is booked out for children's parties most weekends. Local contacts continue to be made, and the Kilburn Literary Festival recently took place here. And as Fr Andrew says 'we haven't actually done any advertising yet, this is all word of mouth!'





## What's next?

There is still further work to do. The Lady Chapel awaits future funds for a phase of work to sound-proof the space in order to provide an area for private prayer when the rest of the church is in use during the week (it can get noisy!).

There are plans to start up new and informal drop-in mother and baby groups and there are exciting ideas too for pop-up cinema, restaurants and silent disco events targeting a different age range.

In the more immediate future the parish will expand its social engagement and has plans to set up debt advice sessions.

Keep tuned to **@churchnw6** for all the latest news.

## Advice for other parishes

Fr Andrew advises that the key to success has been in knowing the community and what it needs – he has been in the parish for 16 years – and in having a solid business plan.

When quizzed by the BBC over the danger of diluting the purpose of the church, he explained that he believed St James was 'returning to the medieval model of the Church, when the Church was absolutely the centre of the community.'



## ChurchCare's summary

Since 2011\* it is now possible to lease parts of a church building for wider use, provided the building remains primarily as a place of worship. Further advice on the legal options for wider use in addition to worship can be found here [http://www.churchcare.co.uk/images/Legal\\_options\\_chart\\_-\\_updated\\_05.pdf](http://www.churchcare.co.uk/images/Legal_options_chart_-_updated_05.pdf)

Whilst not every church will suit the same treatment as St James, it does however seem to have been a success here in a number of ways:

- A church that was previously only open for Sunday worship now has its doors open all day everyday.
- New faces are beginning to appear at the Sunday services.
- People wander into the church to use the post office and are familiarising themselves with being in a church without it being intimidating.





- The interior volume of the building and its impressive scale are central to the significance of the listed church and these have been preserved by the project. Without introducing subdivisions, there are nevertheless multiple uses within one space working in harmony with one another whilst still allowing for regular worship.
- Running costs such as heating, lighting and insurance are now spread amongst the businesses and the PCC, rather than just the PCC, and the church can be heated throughout the week maintaining a level temperature rather than requiring inefficient bursts of heating before a service.
- Having more than one use (in this case 3) within the church is a good idea and protects the viability and sustainability of the project in the situation that one fails.

\* Prior to 2006, to facilitate a scheme such as this would have required formally closing parts of the church. However, thanks to the Pastoral (Amendment) Measure (now superseded by Section 68 of the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011) it is now possible to lease parts of a church building for wider use, provided the building remains primarily as a place of worship.

