



Stannington is a small rural parish (pop. c 1500) just north of the boundary of the City of Newcastle.

It has been an estate village (the Blagdon Estate is still occupied by the family of Viscount Ridley); with farming land and formerly had many institutions – large Psychiatric Hospital; Children’s & TB Hospital and Approved School.

It is now a commuter village and the only institutions are two residential units for Child Care and a highly secure Children’s Unit.

Introduction

There is a small First School (5-9) which has just become affiliated to the Diocese of Newcastle. Largest employers are two pharmaceutical factories on the eastern edge of the parish.

There are 144 on the Electoral Roll, with a usual Sunday attendance of about 54 adults and 7 children. The age profile is fairly high. Most property in the parish costs between £200k – 500k. The Church largely dates from an 1871 handsome rebuild (architect RJ Johnson).

It had no basic facilities; needed rewiring, relighting, repainting and contained no space in which things other than sitting in regimented pews could happen.

Castle Morpeth Borough Council was looking for a centre to provide free access to computers and IT tuition for local residents; and St Mary’s was looking for a way to offer more community involvement and so it was a perfect partnership.

Vision/goals

We wanted a building that:

- Could help us to explore worship freshly and become a centre for a broader ‘family’ life through educational and social means.
- Would welcome more people from the local community, primarily as a Christian witness but also flexible enough for other purposes.
- Could still be fit for purpose in the 21st century.





Describe the project

What we have done:

- Rewired and relit the building
- Put in a sound system with loop
- Built an entrance ramp with rails
- Created space at east and west ends of nave by removing pews
- Built an extended raised area between chancel and nave for musical performances, plays etc
- Dealt with extensive dry / wet rot under nave floors
- Created a small community room in the south west corner, used for learning, social opportunities and meetings
- Created a (disabled friendly) lavatory and a well equipped kitchen
- Created an IT On-line Centre at the base of the tower, used by groups of mainly elderly people during the week.
- Renewed lead gullies etc; repaired roofs; re-pointed vast areas of stonework etc.

How did you start?

- Consultations with church members about objectives
- Consultations with DAC and Architects
- Leafleted the parish and held consultations with the public to explain our hopes and the reasons for them
- Formed a Fund Raising group
- Created phases for the managing of the work

Who were your main partners in developing and implementing this project?

- Architect, Archdeacons and PCC
- Funders, including English Heritage, Entrust; Delhi Community Fund (local fund using opencast mining community contributions); Stannington Parish Council
- The Bishop of Newcastle acted as Patron and lent much support
- The Diocesan Pastoral Committee lent £35k and the William Leech Fund £10k when funds were needed to complete work economically
- Castle Morpeth Borough Council and its On-line project
- Many private donors and much fund raising in the local community

What was the total cost of the project?

£350,000

What was the funding strategy?

Grants – Donations – Fund raising. The phasing of the work ensured that we anticipated being able to pay for each part before it began.





How long did it take from start to finish - from initial proposal to the building being completed and opened?

We launched the scheme in February 2002; the building has been in use for most of the time (one three month and one five week period when it had to be closed). Most of the essential work was completed at the end of 2006. We hope to finish repaying the loans by the end of 2010.

What lessons were learnt? What would you have done differently?

The project has gone as smoothly as we could have hoped for. The fund raising still feels endless – but increasingly fresh volunteers have come forwards with good ideas and energy to do it. We managed to keep the good-will of the community and most of those who were ‘against it’, think now that the church is much improved.



Nave remains largely unaltered

Successes:

- Finalist in the Country Life ‘Village Church for Village Life’ competition (2009).
- We have been able to fulfil all of our goals.
- We have massively raised our profile in the local community.





Has there been an increase in footfall?

Greatly. There is slight growth in congregations, but the building is now actively used for about 20 hours a week, with a much wider variety of events happening here.

To what degree has this project contributed to the sustainability of the building itself?

Once the costs have been met, income from fundraising will continue to attend to the building's longer term needs. At some point in the future, the 130 year old roof will need to be retiled!



IT centre in the base of the tower

What management structures are in place for the running of the building?

The PCC's Fabric Committee follows an annual cycle of maintenance and keeps abreast of needs. A Quinquennial has just been completed and needs to be attended to.

To what degree has this project contributed to the life of the church as church?

- It has given us a fresh sense of 'what's possible' under God
- It has helped people to work together creatively to a common end
- Several small interest groups have formed (Flowers; Needlework; IT Groups; Music Group etc) and meet regularly and provide friendship
- The renewed building meant that we had more to bring to a proposed 'formal friendship' with our local school, just over the churchyard wall, that has now resulted in a formal Affiliation relationship.
- We now have the opportunity and capacity to work differently when we choose

Any future plans for the building?

Not at the moment. If you want to contact the church or to find out more visit their website at: <http://stmaryschurchstannington.ik.com/>

