

## CASE STUDY

### ST MARY THE VIRGIN, CHALGROVE, DIOCESE OF OXFORD, COFE

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

The website provides a very detailed story of the restoration of this church including videos.

[www.chalgrovechurch.org/360](http://www.chalgrovechurch.org/360)

Population: 2,830 (2011 Census)

Chalgrove is a large rural village in South Oxfordshire which supports six shops, including a post office, and three pubs. St Mary the Virgin, listed Grade 1, dates from the twelfth century. It is thought to remain substantially as it was in 1500 but had minor alterations in the C18th. The chancel contains a nearly complete set of nationally important medieval wall paintings dedicated to St Mary the Virgin which are believed to have been painted around 1320.

Canon Ian Cohen arrived in 1988 and felt that the first important thing was to renovate and modernise the Red Lion pub and the three cottages which were vested in the Trustees of the Church Estate. He and the Trustees ensured they were renovated and rented out and the pub was a viable operation so proving that the church was a responsible and effective landlord.

In 2000 the John Hampden Hall, the church hall, was fully modernised and refurbished to provide small offices and meeting rooms. Run by the John Hampden Trust which is made up of volunteers, it is a facility for the whole community, is available for hire and manages to pay for itself.

The main priority at St Mary's was to ensure its fabric was in good repair. There was a serious damp problem to be dealt with and in 2003 repair works were carried out, culminating in re-roofing in 2005.

The next priorities were identified as the need for a new bell chamber and facilities to be installed inside the church. As there was an existing, if old, heating system, toilets were identified as a higher priority to encourage more activities in the church.

In 2007 a servery and two toilets, one fully accessible, were installed at the base of the west tower, providing a new floor to the ringing chamber above. A new spiral staircase was also designed for the new bell chamber and cupboard space was provided for flower arrangers' requirements. This was all hidden behind an existing Victorian wooden screen.

A small viewing window was installed above the screen so that the bell-ringers can see down the nave. The pews have been movable for over twenty-five years, and have been retained. They can be placed at an angle which enables everyone to see during services. The facilities and flexibility of the pews – they can even be moved outside – has increased the number and type of events able to be held in the church. Banquets, barn dances and Parties-in-the-Pews have all been held and the church is now used four to five times a month – much more than previously. Since then it has completed a half million pound project of conservation and refurbishment focusing on the nave and chancel. This has included new heating, lighting and sound systems as well as complete internal redecoration. Charles Baker, the project manager says that they deliberately phased the project as it had been important to gradually build up trust that the PCC is looking after the church responsibly. At every stage, they have held Open Days and consulted. The aim has been to show that it will still be very recognisable as the church as fears had been expressed that it was in danger of becoming too like a village hall.

