

CASE STUDY

ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH, AYLSHAM, NORFOLK, DIOCESE OF NORWICH, COFE

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/Aylshamparishchurch> // www.aylshamparishchurch.org.uk

Population: 6,016 (2011 census)

Aylsham is a busy market town on the banks of the River Bure in Norfolk, and St Michael's, the Grade I listed parish church is the town's oldest building and stands in the town centre.

Major refurbishment projects during the last few years have not only enhanced worship, but enabled the church to open its doors to the wider community for concerts, exhibitions, bring-and-buy sales and tea and coffee during summer.

During earlier works pews were removed from the south aisle and the front of the nave where a dais was built to accommodate the lower altar table. The current heating and sound systems were added and a lighting system, which included award-winning fluorescent tubes in the nave was installed. That was replaced when from 2000 onwards the appearance of parts of the church was dramatically altered. This was thanks to major fund-raising efforts which included the introduction of the Monday Market in the church.

The West end floor was raised to enable a level access from both doors, with a ramp curving down to the nave. A small kitchen, servery and disabled toilet were added and a children's corner replaced the marble Jeremy tomb which moved to the nave. The pews were

removed from the North aisle and the North transept was cleared to create open spaces for exhibitions and worship groups. The new computerised lighting system which includes 18 chandeliers and targeted spot lighting enhanced the atmosphere.

Work was also carried out between July and October in 2016 creating a small separately heated and sound insulated room within the building.

The appointment of the Revd Canon Andrew Beane gave new impetus to long-awaited plans for the room, which among several functions, serves as a space for children's activities during Sunday services, and also as a choir vestry and meeting room.

The final cost was £102,152 including all professional fees and VAT and the funding came entirely from the Church, with a significant legacy from former parishioner, Mrs Molly Long, to whose memory the room is dedicated.



It has exceeded all expectations and in addition to the functions mentioned above there are regular bookings by other local groups, including children and adult choirs, U3A and schools staff meetings.

The main challenge initially was obtaining the necessary consents and approvals. Although the local DAC was supportive from the outset, other Heritage Bodies opposed the design approach. Costs increased significantly between the original draft proposals and finalised plans and a small overspend during the work challenged the Parish. However, it is felt it got good value for money given the facility provided and the quality of the finishes etc.

The church offers Wi-Fi and hosts the Make & Take, After School club, organ recitals, a chair pilates class, the New Brew coffee shop, SingFest! choir taster sessions, bell ringing and the popular Monday Sale among many other events.