![The Church of England logo]

Case study: St Michael & All Angels, Martlesham Heath

An interview with the Rev Toby Tate

St Michael and All Angels is a community-fundraised church built at the beginning of the 1990s in the centre of the new village of Martlesham Heath, based around an old airfield on the outskirts of Ipswich in Suffolk.

This modern church building has connectivity throughout; in the chapel and church hall, and a public WiFi service provided in the community cafe situated in an extension adjoining the end of the building.
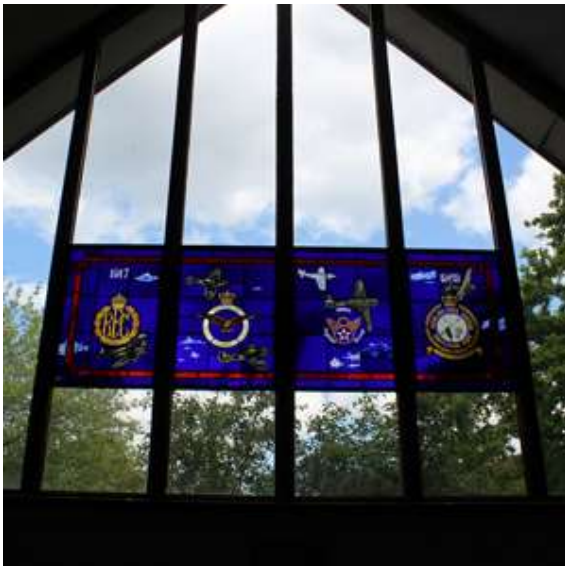
The Reverend Toby Tate, Vicar of Martlesham and Brightwell, presides over three church buildings in two parishes, of which St Michael's is by far the most modern.

"We have the BT headquarters in the parish, just across the road, so a number of our people are quite into communications."

Toby uses a projector to stream YouTube videos and other online resources for some services. The connection is also used for church administration, with secure, cloud-based storage for files when working from the church office.

"The purpose behind the building was also that it could be used for the community, so we have a lot of lettings in here. From birthday parties to Slimming World – various groups come here."
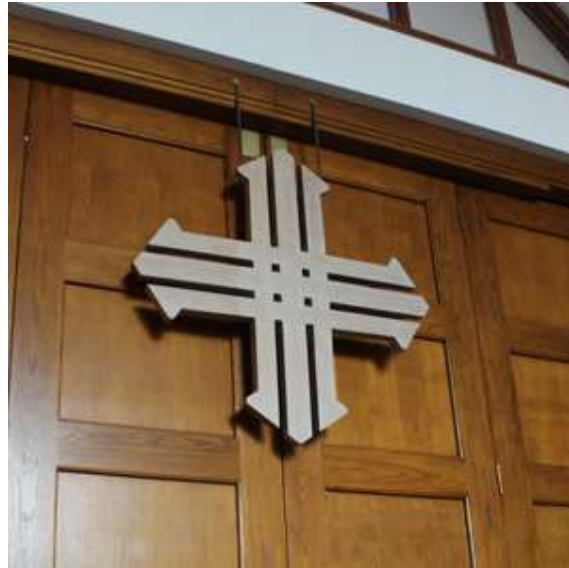

Toby notes that the internet availability and projection capability have both contributed to making the building a much more attractive space for people looking to hire it out for meetings.

2017 saw a celebration of the centenary of the Martlesham Heath Airfield. To mark the occasion, BT boosted the church's WiFi signal, allowing the church the beam WiFi out the the local area. A trail of interactive stations was set up, with QR codes allowing people to discover the history of the airfield on their tour around the heath.

"This is a non-traditional church building. We don't obviously stand out as a church; but also we are at the heart of the community and want to show that we're part of it, and contributing to it."

Future plans might include looking into the feasibility of live-streaming of some services; an idea some church-goers have recently broached with Toby, due to not being able to get to church on a Sunday, or having friends or family members unable to come to a baptism.

"We are a relevant church, and God is of relevance to people. Just because we're talking about God, it doesn't mean we can't also be keeping up with technology."

With many older churches in the diocese – and across the country – only being used for a few hours every Sunday, Toby suggests that getting connected can vastly increase the potential for opening up church buildings to more community use.

"The more we can say 'Church buildings are there; God is relevant to people; and the internet is here to stay – so why aren't we getting involved in using it?' the better chance

we've got of getting people to come to hear the good news about Jesus."