



# The Blyth Valley Team Ministry

- All Saints, Blyford • St. Andrew, Bramfield • St. Mary, Chediston • St. Mary, Halesworth
- St. Peter, Holton • St. Margaret of Antioch, Linstead • St. Peter, Spexhall
- St. Peter, Thorington • St. Mary, Walpole • St. Peter, Wenhaston • St. Andrew, Wissett

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## REGENERATION OF ST MARY'S, HALESWORTH - DRAFT

### WHY REGENERATE?

Regeneration of St Mary's Church has been under consideration for the past 15 to 20 years. The sheer size and scale of any regeneration has always acted as a barrier to progress. However it has become increasingly clear over the past 8 years that regeneration is the only sensible way forward despite the challenges. 5 years ago the BVTM agreed that in order to drive forward the thriving and active Team Ministry that was developing, St Mary's needed to become both central to Team life and fully regenerated. A 'Minster model' ought to be in place. This view has been reinforced over the past two years as the Anglican and Methodist communities embarked on a shared path to bringing two traditions together to create shared worship, ministry and community outreach from a single building. The rationale for doing this is that:

- The (presently Anglican) church is central to the town and seen as such by everyone
- It is a busy building with a high footfall
- It is large enough for two worshipping communities to come together as one and for a wide range of other activities
- The building itself requires so much remedial work just to make it safe, dry and warm that it is a better investment to 'go the whole hog'
- It is either regenerate or close, and the latter option is not acceptable to either tradition
- Both church communities support both the bringing together of two traditions AND regeneration
- Church leaders in both traditions are hugely committed to a shared ministry
- Running costs would be hugely reduced if the building became safe, warm and energy efficient as well as very well used

The strong commitment of church leaders and lay members of both churches to achieve shared, integrated ministry is the driving force behind the current outline proposals.

### WHERE WE ARE NOW

St Mary's, Halesworth is a mediæval building dating from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century but with many Victorian accretions, including two outer aisles that destroy the earlier cruciform shape but which will allow for a useful re-ordering. It is no Long Melford or Blythburgh but is nevertheless an interesting building. It is set right in the middle of the Halesworth community of some 4800 adults. Halesworth itself is a centre for at least twenty villages, ten of them being in the same Team benefice. The 2010 Quinquennial inspection shows the need for a fair amount of work at roof level to make the building dry, but it is nevertheless an essentially sound structure.

The contradiction is this: the interior of the building is in many ways worn out, but at the same time, for a variety of reasons, it has become a place that people *flow through*.

It is tired, in that the Victorian furniture in the nave is in poor condition and a failed re-ordering some fifteen years ago, with the removal of pews on the north and south sides, made it even more dangerous with many plinths, steps, pipes and slopes over which to trip and fall. Victorian green glass darkens the building. Victorian gas-lights have discoloured the stonework. The heating is on its last legs and the church can be too cold for worship in winter. It is a 'tall church' with high ceilings which swallow both sound and light, as well as heat. It is a place for people (despite the foregoing) because people have, over the last ten years, been drawn to use the church for prayer and reflection, for social purposes, exhibitions and concerts. The Blessed Sacrament is reserved and there is a much used votive candle stand, the latter situated in a pleasant, small lady chapel. The Team Office and the Team Administrator are situated in St Mary's, which means that many people from the Team parishes come through.

The tradition of the church in recent decades (certainly since the arrival of Geoffrey Arrand, the former Archdeacon) has become liberal, moderate, open catholic, so a building is needed in which beautiful, expansive liturgy can take place. At the same time, in the coming years the people of Halesworth Methodist Church will unite with Anglicans as one congregation, so it has to become a place in which Methodist folk are entirely comfortable. The People of Halesworth Methodist Church have devoted much time and prayer to their future, and they have discerned that this is indeed as part of a united Methodist-Anglican congregation worshipping at St Mary's.

### FIRST STEPS

The first step is to develop and secure an ambitious but achievable *shared vision* for how St Mary's should be regenerated, through wide consultation amongst the two congregations, then across the churches of the Team benefice and our ecumenical partners, then with the wider community in town and villages. We could start by thinking of what we do now, and improve the church so we can do it better and more safely, and perhaps more often, before we move onto 'thinking big!' about the final vision and outcome.

It is imperative to work in conjunction with other developments and agencies in the town, particularly the Rifle Hall, progress on which is fairly high profile at Town Council. It would be good to have a representative on any steering group and input from the wider community. This will help identify what the usage will actually be before the planning of reordering.

At an early stage, a thorough business plan will need to be developed, to show possible donors that our vision is clear, necessary and achievable. Communication will be of the essence. We expect that embarking on such a project will fire volunteers from church and community to be associated with and to work for the regeneration of this building so that it once again plays the role intended by the people of the Halesworth community in the 15<sup>th</sup> century – to be a place for the whole community, young, old and all the rest.

### THE ABSOLUTE MINIMUM

The basic minimum needed is for a church that is warm, dry and light, with a large, level open space that is still a place of worship but which is also a place frequented by the wider community. The Quinquennial works need to be carried out. The pews need to be removed and an effective but unobtrusive heating system installed. The floor needs to be totally level in the nave, and disabled access created to other parts of the building. A significant nave sanctuary situated at the

east needs to be created, with an altar around which the People of God may gather, together with an ambo/lectern for the proclamation of the word and suitable seating for ministers and servers. These should be portable, and the nave sanctuary should either be portable or capable of being lowered flush with the floor. Seating for the congregation (the audience, when used for secular purposes) needs to be comfortable, easily movable, and in keeping with the building.

### NEXT BUT VITAL STEPS

This is where the consultation begins to have an impact and so the steps below are to be considered as probably essential whatever varied uses are agreed for the space. It is likely that creating a flexible, easily changed, multi-purpose space is crucial but it could include all sorts of functions, for example even small library spaces, room for an early years project or art and craft space. There are a whole range of exciting possibilities including the use of the height of the church to increase the available space.

Throughout any regeneration programme cognisance needs to be given to the fact that we are bringing two communities, congregations and traditions together and thought needs to be constantly given to what furniture, fabric, fittings and other equipment we may want to bring into the regenerated space, including from the Methodist Church, and what we need to lose.

We also need to explore how best to do this in a way that harnesses, cherishes and retains our resources, limits energy demands, reduces our carbon footprint and avoids waste, that supports our environment and helps preserve our future world.

Regarded as important is a spacious foyer (and potential reception area) through which people enter and are greeted; this will also improve heat retention. The outer Victorian aisles need to be partitioned with materials which will not significantly reduce natural light to the nave to provide a range of rooms, spaces and facilities. It is seen as vital that water is brought into the building and lavatory and baby-changing facilities with good disabled access created. (Gas may also be needed, depending upon the new heating system and type of cooker if one is installed.) A kitchen and café area will enable greater development of both churches' existing ministry of hospitality. The Team Office will be a significant part of the re-development whether it stays in its present location or is relocated nearer the main entrance, which could be either the north-west or south-west doors. Other important uses of the partitioned areas will be the provision of storage space capable of storing chairs and other items and the provision of a meeting/counselling room. A well-appointed vestry/sacristy is a requirement, whether in its present position or not. Telephone lines and IT cabling etc. will all need included throughout the building.

### THE ORGAN

The organ is a significant historic three-manual instrument by a leading builder dating from 1910 which is now unreliable and in need of significant restoration. A conversion from tracker to electric action is required with, perhaps, a detached console. This would open up possibilities not only for worship but for concerts and recitals. Another option would be its replacement with a good quality digital organ, but this would be a less welcome alternative. A grand piano would also be a valuable asset.

## THE BELLS

There is a good ring of eight bells, but they are heavy and in need of restoration, possibly with the inclusion of sound control. They may have around five years life left in them as they are. Bell-ringing is strong in the benefice, and bells are seen as an instrument of outreach.

## AUDIO-VISUAL FACILITIES

The existing hearing loop will need to be extended throughout the nave and sound reinforcement improved. The introduction of a professional sound system, a data projector, an electrically operated screen and other multi-media equipment including IT would greatly improve the building as a location for business meetings and conferences, as well as for worship and social activities.

## SECURITY

The present CCTV, although of relatively poor quality, has been effective in the discouragement of vandalism and theft. It needs to be upgraded, both for security and to meet the standards of police evidence.

## FINANCE

The cost of thoroughly regenerating the church building could easily hit seven figures. It may be necessary to see such an enormous project in several linked stages, but without any stage closing off its successor. In addition, funding for bells or organ, for example, might be obtained from grant-making trusts that are specific to these and unavailable for other purposes. It is important to have an integrated vision. In a time of national financial difficulty that will affect Halesworth as much as anywhere in the next two to three years, setting out on a project such as this might be seen as foolhardy. However, to begin with, the only other option to regeneration is closure. The building cannot continue as it is if we are to protect the safety and wellbeing of all who use it.

Our links with the local Methodist congregation are now firmly established and we look forward to becoming a united Christian Community in the Town. We already worship together regularly including at the Eucharist. We join together in other activities such as the Mother's Union/Women's Fellowship. Our ministerial staff share in leading worship in both the Anglican and Methodist churches. Representatives of both denominations have met together with District and Diocesan Ecumenical Officers to produce a Constitution and Vision Statement which are in the process of being accepted by both Churches. We are currently working on our sharing agreement. We work towards uniting as one congregation in the near future, possibly as soon as 2013.

The future of the Methodist church premises will be considered by the Property Division of the Methodist Church, with the possibility of a gift towards the cost of regeneration. Other money towards this new venture could also be forthcoming from the Methodist Church and perhaps Anglican sources, but nothing is confirmed. There is an optimistic and positive attitude amongst the members of the Methodist church. The local clergy are at present eager to join in the united ministerial team. It is encouraging that both clergy and laity can be seen working together in the community, most notably in the coming months the establishment of a bereavement support group. The Town of Halesworth is working together with partners, including both churches, to improve community facilities in the Town and the regeneration is part of this.

After a number of years in the relative doldrums, a certain amount of new energy and vigour is obvious in the worshipping congregation at St Mary's although it has to be said that we have further to go. The growing links with the Methodist church are positive factors. There is new and increasingly effective lay leadership. Whilst the congregation is, on the whole, aged, numbers are slowly increasing and the average age slowly declining, the parish share has been paid in full and maintenance has been done after years of neglect. Links with the wider community are improving and the Blyth Valley Team Ministry itself is growing as an effective and integrating force. Whilst a certain amount of funding will come from local sources, we shall have to rely on generous benefactors and grant making trusts to take a project forward.

It is hoped that, as it is intended to make St Mary's a place for church *and* community funding will be available from sources not usually open to churches.

This document is produced by the Team Rector, with assistance from the Revd Pam Bayliss, our Methodist colleague and Jane Held, Lay Chair of the Blyth Valley Team Council and worked through by the Methodist/Anglican Steering Group. The next draft or document will be one owned by the leadership and councils of both churches. Photos and drawings will need to be added. As soon as possible we ought to be talking about one church council.