

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ST CLEMENT OUTWELL

Text, design and photography

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**REACH Ely (Reimagining Churches as
Community Assets for the Common Good)**
is a multi-partner research project that
aims to help communities make fuller use
of their churches.

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The project is implemented by

**Centre for Social Innovation at
Cambridge Judge Business School
and the Diocese of Ely**

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and Historic England*

www.reachely.org

The challenges facing church communities and their buildings have been extensively studied in the light of declining church attendance in the United Kingdom over several decades. REACH Ely aims to address the less-well-understood opportunities for churches to engage and reconnect with the 97.7 per cent of the local communities in the Diocese of Ely who do not attend their parish churches.

With the absence of universal determinants of success and failure of churches in the community engagement context, the REACH Ely project will provide an understanding of the relationship between communities and wider use of church buildings as well as the contribution that churches make to the common good. The project will determine community values, needs and opportunities that can be used in the most effective way to ensure a win-win outcome for communities and sustainable future of church buildings.

The **case study series** is based on in-depth interviews and observations about church building use with informants from a subset of deaneries and parishes in the Diocese of Ely, supplemented with secondary information about the communities they represent. The purpose of the case study is to unearth various church experiences in renovating and envisioning their buildings as missional and social spaces, engaging with local and wider communities, addressing current challenges, and learning from their practice.

The **Glossary** is a separate document that accompanies the case study series. It is available as a download from the project's website www.reachely.org

On the cover: Sunlight reflected on the metal cross in the nave.

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ST CLEMENT OUTWELL

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Wisbech Lynn Marshland

Address: Church Terrace, Outwell,
Wisbech PE14 8RG

Website: www.stclementsoutwell.org.uk



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade I listed building; Utility room with facilities; Church registered in Historic England's Heritage at Risk; Coffee shop; Medieval stone gargoyles; Roof carvings with the flight of angels, apostles and figures; 15th-century parish chest; Stained glass; Brasses, monuments and memorials; Victorian pews; Hammerbeam roof in Lynne Chapel; Tower clock; WWI commemorative seat

Congregation to Population Ratio: 10 / 2,093

Fundraising: Friends of St Clement's group; Concerts; Christmas Tree Festival; Quiz nights

Income Generation: Coffee shop; No rental policy

Communications: Friends of St Clement's website and newsletter; Church newsletter; Nextdoor social group; Village magazine; Visitors' Book; Churchyard and parish records CD; Postcards; Leaflets; Noticeboard; Posters

Community Engagement: Welle Churchers Together joint events; Coffee shop; First World War project; Concerts; Guest speakers; Festival of Angels and Scarecrows; Upwell and Outwell Festival; Arts and Crafts Fair; Bible study group; Village lunch; Craft and Chatter group; Conservation cleaning workshop; Poetry group; Contribution to Wisbech foodbank; Involvement with village activities.

ROOTS

Profile

Outwell is a village and civil parish in the borough of King's Lynn, sitting on the western boundary of Norfolk and bordering Cambridgeshire. It is a large village, with 2,083 residents (2011 census). The village is 45 miles (70 km) west of Norwich, and 12 miles (20 km) south-west of King's Lynn; the nearest town is Wisbech, which is 5 miles (8 km) to the north-west. The village adjoins and shares many amenities with the large village of Upwell to the south (population 2,456). The nearest railway station to Outwell is Downham Market on the Fen Line between King's Lynn and Cambridge, and the nearest airport is in Norwich.

The village and parish is traversed by 17th-century drainage channels which characterise this part of Fenland Norfolk with some Dutch-style bridges and long dykes. The north and eastern parts of the parish consist of arable and pasture fields. There has been a large influx of temporary foreign workers in recent years who are engaged in cultivating and harvesting crops for local farms, particularly pumpkins and courgettes.

Village amenities include a public house, a hotel, and a modern village hall with its own car park. There is Beaupré Community Primary School, a village shop and a hairdressers. There was Beaupré Hall, a large 16th-century manor house on the outskirts of Outwell, built by the Beaupré family, who also financed chantry chapels attached to the church at Outwell. In decline since the Victorian era, the hall was commandeered by the RAF during the Second World War. Following this, the Hall fell into a state of further disrepair until its demolition in 1966.

St Clement's church is situated at the heart of the village on the Well Creek on what feels almost like a fenland island. The Well Creek is managed by the Well Creek Trust and hosts the annual river festival as well as fenland skating when the weather is cold enough to freeze the creek. There is also St Andrew's Methodist Church in the village. A cemetery is located separately from the churches. Another parish church of St Peter is located in Upwell to the south of Outwell along the channel (*see photo on page 9*).

St Clement Outwell is featured in *England's Thousand Best Churches* by Simon Jenkins (2012).





Top: St Clement's church viewed from south-east. Bottom: Exterior of Beaupré Chapel window; View of the church with the 'Coffee Shop Open' noticeboard near the road.

Building

The oldest part of St Clement's church dates from the 13th century, but most of the church was built at various times between about 1350 and 1500. The Grade I listed church building, which can accommodate approximately 200 people, lies in the centre of the village, circled almost entirely by Well Creek, which forms a basin to the rear of the church. The wetland environment has caused structural problems for the church in the past.

The building materials of St Clement's church are Barnack and rag stone plastered, except the north nave chapel which is of brick with stone dressings. The roofs of the chancel, nave, south aisle, north nave chapel, and porch are slated, and the rest leaded. There are embattled parapets throughout, except to the north aisle. The tower contains six bells, although these are no longer rung as the wooden beams supporting them are unsound. A recording of the bells is used for weddings and services. There was a church hall, which was demolished some time ago and the land sold for housing.

Recent renovations include securing the loose stonework on the parapets which were then reconstructed. The north transept roof and south aisle were re-slated and the hopper heads, rainwater gutters and downpipes cleaned. The interior of the church was recently limewashed. The East window of the Beaupré (or Lady) Chapel was in a precarious state and emergency repairs were undertaken in 2017.

There is a utility room in the church, with a sink and a WC facility. A permanent area has been set aside to create a coffee shop. The church is heated by two oil boilers. During the daytime, the church of St Clement is locked but keys can be obtained from the nearby village shop.

Heritage at Risk. In November 2019, Historic England added St Clement's to its Heritage at Risk register – this is a programme that protects and manages the historic environment. Historic England's Heritage at Risk works with owners, friends groups, developers and other stakeholders to find solutions for 'at risk' historic places and sites across England (historicengland.org.uk).



Aerial view of St Clement Outwell (Photo by John Fielding, www.flickr.com/photos/john_fielding)



Top: View towards the chancel from the nave. Middle: Beaupré Chapel and seating arrangement in the nave. Bottom: Utility room with facilities under the tower; South entrance to the church.



Pages 6-7; Panoramic view of the nave and the chancel.

Artefacts

Inside and out the church, medieval carvings in stone and wood are exceptional. There are extraordinary gargoyles outside, and, in the nave, flights of angels alternate with pairings of apostles with figures either demonic or human – each one is different – these represent various contemporary characters or walks of life. The south aisle features more angels, including some with musical instruments. The north aisle or Lynne Chapel features small hammerbeam roof and some beautiful angels holding a papal tiara, possibly an allusion to Saint Clement who was a successor of Saint Peter as Bishop of Rome and Pope.

According to Simon Jenkins, Outwell church's windows "lend the interior the aura of an old country house conservatory".¹ Three windows at the east end of the church have medieval painted glass, much of which is unusual. The earliest, from about 1420–1440, is in the tracery of the East window of the chancel. The most interesting glass, however, dates from the 16th century and is in the Fincham Chapel and in the East window of the south aisle in the Beaupré (or Lady) Chapel. The Chapel also contains a 16th-century

monument to Nicholas and Edmund de Beaupré and a tomb recess set back from the black and white tiled floor. The chancel aisle is cut off from the nave by a wrought iron screen. An earlier local family is remembered by the brass to Richard Quadryng in the north aisle. There is a medieval latten lectern. A huge 15th-century iron-bound chest with seven locks in the north aisle, used to store church and parish documents, is one of about 150 identified in England (the chest has been restored in 2020 with money raised by the Friends of the church). It is similar to the chest at King's College, Cambridge.

The pews are thought to date from the Victorian era and some are suffering from woodworm attack and are in quite poor condition. The PCC has considered removing these at various times to create more space for functions. The 14th-century font has a hexagonal bowl with two shallow cinquefoiled niches on each face and one on each face of the shaft. A memorial to the service personnel who died during the WWI – a metal commemorative seat, replacing a wooden one – is set outside by the church entrance.

¹Jenkins, S. 2012. *England's Thousand Best Churches*. London: Penguin Books, p.466.



Nave with the with the flight of carved angels; Statue of Saint Clement; 15th-century iron-bound parish chest.

RUNNING

Team

Following the retirement of the previous incumbent, a new rector was installed in July 2020. The licensing and a joint service took place at St Peter's church in Upwell, and parish churches at Upwell and Outwell gave an official welcome to their new priest-in-charge. Some of Outwell church's services are also led by retired vicars, the sacristan, and the archdeacon. There is a PCC and a churchwarden has been elected at the delayed annual parish church meeting in November 2020.

St Clement Outwell is a member of a group of churches – Welle Churches Together. The group also includes St Peter's church in Upwell and the two Methodist Churches (Upwell Chapel and St Andrew's, Outwell). Joint events are held for Lent, World Day of Prayer and Remembrance Services. In the fairly recent past, the group have held open air services at the Boat Basin (on the banks of Well Creek) for Palm Sunday and Harvest. The Methodist churches in Upwell and Outwell have dwindling congregations and planning generally falls to the same small group.

Religious Services

Holy Communion or Services of the Word start at 11 a.m. A children's service is held at Upwell at 9.30 a.m. and Messy Church is also held there. There is also a shared service at Upwell (fifth Sundays alternate between the two churches). The primary school holds their annual carol service at St Clement Outwell. The age range of the congregation at St Clement's is quite senior and attendance numbers are typically between 10-14. The congregation is occasionally swelled by transient land workers, largely from Eastern Europe, although they tend to come in to light a candle rather than staying for a service.

Covid-19 impact. Church services and other activities were temporarily suspended during the national lockdown and coronavirus pandemic in 2020. After re-opening the church in June 2020, services have been taking place regularly observing all social distancing regulations. An informal network of churchgoers and coffee shoppers keep in touch on **WhatsApp** and by **phone**. Because of Covid-related restrictions, the church is unable to hold any events in 2020 and the coffee shop has been closed since mid-March.

Parish Share

The revised parish share contribution for Outwell for 2021 is £8,427. The current figure is £9,269 and the church has paid all of the share in 2020.

Fundraising

Friends of St Clement's group has an independent charitable status and was created at the end of 2012. The initial focus of Friends – who are not necessarily members of the congregation – was to conserve and restore the twelve pairs of finely carved wooden sculptures portraying the Apostles and 'demons' on the buttresses of the roof. These are unique but badly damaged by death-watch beetle. Survey work on these figures revealed other damage to the church's nave ceiling. Grants and fundraising initiatives have enabled some substantial roof repairs to be undertaken.

Other major work including repairs, conservation and restoration of the internal roof structure, the carvings, and Beaupré Chapel have been funded. Several of the antique items of furniture in St Clement's have been conserved and restored, including the parish chest in

the north aisle, the unique gifting box, the wooden base of the lectern and two Glastonbury chairs. The work was undertaken with a grant of £1,000 from the Leche Trust and funds raised by the Friends. The group has also run a conservation cleaning workshop. The Friends group is open to everyone who supports the group's aims.

Concerts. Concerts are held regularly; recent examples include Marham Military Wives Choir, a Gilbert and Sullivan group, and an old-time music hall.

Christmas Tree Festival features craft and gift stalls, Teddy Tombola, refreshments, mulled wine, and the coffee shop, and raises around £4,000 per year.

Quiz Nights are organised by the PCC and held at the local hotel. They raise in the region of £70 for church funds.



St Peter's church in Upwell.

Income Generation

Outwell church is not currently rented out and the modern village hall offers scope for rentals. A regular income is produced by the coffee shop (see *Community*).

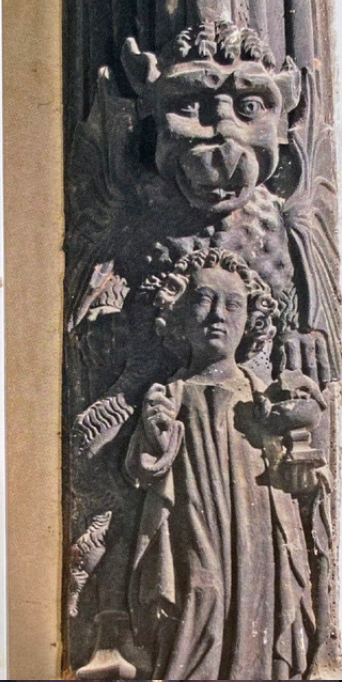
Communications

The Friends of St Clement's group has a well-developed **website** and the team use **Nextdoor** social networking service to spread the word about events. A weekly **newsletter** is posted on the internet and church events are advertised in the **village magazine**. In addition, the Friends of St Clement's publish a regular **newsletter** on recent fundraising activities and upcoming events. The **Visitors' Book** often has comments from people attempting family research.

The churchyard and cemetery have been mapped by a local history society, and this, together with parish records, is available on a **CD** for anyone searching for family burial sites. **Information leaflets** on the history of the church with a map and church artefacts are available. A new set of eight full-colour **postcards** is available of views of the church and some of its treasures.

There are **noticeboards** outside the church and throughout the village. Local shops and a hairdresser are also happy to display **posters** and provide help with the **publicity**.





REACH

Community

British Legion. The church has ties with the local branch of the British Legion and hosts the open-air service at the war memorial in conjunction with them and the local scout group.

First World War Project. Members of the Friends group and the Family History group have researched the biographies of every man from the village who served in the First World War, totalling some 263 men. A roll of honour was created and a copy placed in the Wisbech and Fenland Museum. A concert was held to commemorate the centenary of the end of the war and a memorial bench installed in the St Clement's churchyard. A large display of knitted and crocheted poppies was held in the church.

Coffee Shop. A permanent area is set aside in the church for the coffee shop, which runs every Tuesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and is staffed by volunteers. Villagers donate cakes and pastries and soup and other supplies are bought in. Typically, around 25 to 30 people attend for teas, coffees and light lunches. A small number of those visiting have gone on to become worshippers at the church.

“Some of the regular church attenders do make the effort to come to coffee shop. People who move into the village have sometimes come to coffee shop and then have come to services.”

Margaret Lake

Churchwarden Elect and Friends of St Clement's committee member

Events

Concerts. St Clement Outwell regularly provides venue for concerts (*see Fundraising*).

Book launch. An American author had written a thriller based in the village featuring the treasures and artefacts of St Clement's church, and the book launch event was held at the church.

Guest speakers. Speakers from the Universities of Cambridge, Durham, and the University of East Anglia have visited Outwell church to give talks about the church's treasures. An academic study day was held in the past, followed by lunch at a local hotel. In addition, Outwell church members are invited to give presentations about St Clement's treasures at various events, for example, at the March Society talks.

Coffee shop in the church and information stand.



Festival of Angels and Scarecrows was held in the village. The local blacksmith had made small angels that were used to create a trail around the village.

Upwell and Outwell Festival. Started in 2016, the festival is an annual whole-village event that includes a raft race on the Well Creek, a barbeque, and a family party at the village hall. It is followed by a music festival, with a funfair and games stalls. The raft race passes the church, which is open for the event, with visitors able to enjoy exhibitions, e.g. of blankets made by the knitting group, and to use the WC facilities. During the festival, the coffee shop is moved into the porch overlooking the river for the event.

Arts and Crafts Fair is organised in the spring and held at Outwell village hall.

Engagement

Involvement with village activities. St Clement's church is involved with many of the groups in both Outwell and Upwell, including the British Legion, the scouts, the primary school, the Family History Society, the Methodist Chapel, and the Catholic Church in Wisbech. The previous vicar had been building a relationship with the school but that has not continued due to lack of personnel. A village survey had been conducted several years ago but the response was very poor. On his own initiative the vicar leafleted the houses in the centre of the village and one person came to one service.

Village Lunch is organised three times a year, attracting around between 60 and 85 people. A local ukulele band provides music and the income raised is split between the church and a cancer unit at Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn.

Craft and Chatter Group. This group takes place on the third Tuesday of the month, and is linked to the Norfolk Knitters and Stitchers, a charity that stitches and knits for local, national and international charities. Other people join in to enjoy colouring and a small group of musicians play and sing while the activities take place. The blankets produced have been exhibited at the Outwell Festival.

Conservation Cleaning Workshop. Participants from a wide area attended the workshop, all keen to discuss the problems they had with maintaining the churches that they were involved with. There was a lot of practical and hands-on advice. The day was funded by the National Lottery and organised by the Diocese of Ely's Historic Church Buildings Support Officer.

Bible Study Group. One of the parishioners runs this group on a regular basis.

Poetry Group meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month. Their poems are published in the village magazine.

Wisbech Foodbank. St Clement's church regularly contributes to a collection of items for a local foodbank on a monthly basis (*See also REACH Ely case study: Wisbech*).



Top-left: Christmas tree decoration (Photo from www.lynnnews.co.uk). Rows 1-3: Christmas Fair at St Clement's (Photos from www.wisbechstandard.co.uk). Row 4: Book signing event in the church with the local writer William Smith, the author of 'Outwell in a Nutshell' (Photo from www.yourlocalpaper.co.uk); Information stand about stained glass windows and carvings in the church.

REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Income generation

The PCC has tried various ways of both raising funds and providing community events. The Friends of St Clement's was formed to support repairs and restoration to the fabric but not the day-to-day running of the church, for improvements to the facilities or the purchasing of items such as exhibition display boards. The congregation is quite small, meaning that the burden of raising the parish share falls on a small number of worshippers. The church is currently not hired out to external groups.

Asset management

Outwell church has many historic artefacts, in terms of carvings in stone and wood and stained glass. The cost of maintaining these is an ongoing challenge.

Small and senior congregation

The core congregation is in the older age range and there are no separate groups for children or young people at the church. Some children attend the family service and Messy Church at Upwell.

Lack of volunteers

The church and its groups are run by a small group of dedicated volunteers. While the village is supportive of events held by St Clement's, additional volunteers would help to spread the burden.

Church building condition

Costly repairs to the structure of the church are required and a more efficient heating system and better facilities for the coffee shop and the kitchen area are necessarily a lower priority. A luncheon club that runs at Upwell church could be hosted on alternate weeks at St Clement's if there were better facilities.



“Making it a community focus is almost going back to the way it was in the 12-14th centuries... because that piece behind the rood screen would have been for the clergy. In [the nave], although there was probably no seating whatsoever, the parish waiting would have been going on and they only had to take communion twice a year, and they were just in church. The church was the centre of village life, it’s actually going full circle.”

Margaret Lake
Churchwarden Elect and
Friends of St Clement’s
committee member



Lessons Learned

To create a living church

The introduction of the coffee shop and a range of daytime clubs has meant that the church is frequently open to visitors and locals alike, making the church a welcoming place.

To promote and popularise local heritage

The historic carvings and rare stained glass have attracted experts to visit and to advise on cleaning and restoration, leading to a training workshop and talks by experts in this field.

To foster collaboration links with other churches

Members of other local churches, of other denominations, are welcome to worship at St Clement's. The church regularly teams up with St Peter's church in Upwell for combined services, and as part of Welle Churches Together, Outwell church participates in the World Day of Prayer at each of the four churches in rotation (see *Team*). The Annual Remembrance Service also alternates between St Clement's and St Andrew's Methodist Church after a service at the Memorial.

To work in partnership

During the interregnum, the church has had to rely on clergy and church officials from other ministries to keep the services running. It has worked with other churches in the diocese on issues such as safeguarding. The PCC relies on the voluntary support of the Friends of St Clement's group, not all of whom are members of the congregation, to raise funds for essential structural repairs.

To be open and responsive to change

The team at the church is flexible in terms of what might be done to make the church more accessible to the community. The PCC has discussed removing the Victorian pews to make the space more usable.



“People really do appreciate [the church], it’s been there for the three points in their lives – the baptism, marriage and funeral. I think they would be put out if it wasn’t there.”

Margaret Lake

Churchwarden Elect and
Friends of St Clement’s
committee member

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