

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets  
for the Common Good

# ST LAURENCE FOXTON



*Text, design, 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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**Centre for Social Innovation at  
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**[www.reachely.org](http://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](http://www.reachely.org)

*On the cover: The northern entrance to the church.*

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# ST LAURENCE FOXTON

**Church Category:** Rural

**Deanery:** Shingay

**Address:** High St, Foxton, Cambridge CB22 6RP

**Website:** [www.thefourchurchbenefice.org/church/st-laurences](http://www.thefourchurchbenefice.org/church/st-laurences)



## Summary

**Buildings and Artefacts:** Grade I listed; Kitchen and facilities inside the church in separate rooms

**Congregation to Population Ratio:** 27 / 1,218

**Fundraising:** Neighbourhood group organisation STREAM; Village Scarecrow Festival

**Income Generation:** Concerts; Foxton Open Gardens event

**Communications:** Webpage of the church on The Four Church Benefice website; Church page in *The Laurentian* village newsletter; Weekly church notice; Visitors Book

**Community Engagement:** Village Scarecrow Festival; School collaboration.

# ROOTS

## Profile

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Formerly a market town, Foxton is a small-medium village, population 1,218 (2011 census), situated seven miles south of Cambridge. Foxton village is a convenient location for commuters – the railway station is on the main line between Cambridge and London. The village comprises approximately 480 homes that include several well-preserved 16th- and 17th-century timber framed houses. Foxton amenities include a 19th century public house, a village hall dating from 1929 and recently refurbished with three meeting rooms, a sports pavilion at a short distance from the church, a shop and post office, primary school, community special school, learning centre, and exhibition stands. Also located in Foxton is the Villiers Park Educational Trust, a national social mobility charity for high ability students from less advantaged backgrounds. There is a recreation ground with children's playground, tennis courts, bowling green, football and cricket pitches. A conservation area Foxton Dovecot and Meadow is in close proximity to the St Laurence's parish church.





*Top: The view of St Laurence's from the High Street. Middle: The south side of the church and the Foxton village sign.  
Bottom: Foxton Village Hall.*

### Building

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The parish church can accommodate approximately 200 people and has been dedicated to St Laurence from as early as 1225. Grade I listed, parts of the current church building date from the Saxon era. The church tower houses five bells, which can be rung or chimed, and an electrically driven clock strikes the hours. While St Laurence's is the only church building in Foxton, Methodist services are held in the village hall.

The St Laurence's church occupies a site to the south of the High Street near the centre of the village, a short walk from the railway station. Architecturally, the St Laurence's parish church is an ancient edifice of flint in the Early English, Decorated and Perpendicular styles. The church building is surrounded by a neatly maintained graveyard, still in use for burials and interment of ashes.

In the early 2000s, the Foxton church installed a small kitchen room and a WC with baby changing facilities at the back of the south aisle. Thieves have targeted St Laurence's and stolen oak furniture (2014) and the lead church roof (2016). *'The roof was pouring with rain and the churchwardens were moving buckets around as we worshipped'*, the church rector remembers. The church building was not closed for worship despite having recovered lead stored in the south aisle for a month. People worshipped there but it was closed during the week for eighteen months. At present, the church building is open during the daylight hours.

### Artefacts

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Fine woodwork on the 16th-century rood screen with carved statues and the Crucifixion; The wooden money-box model of the church carved by Charles Impey, a Victorian farmworker; The font in the west end of the nave that sits on Victorian supports; The early 18th century clock in the west end of the building.



*Top: The view of the chancel with the rood screen with carved statues of the Crucifixion. Middle: Pulpit decorations; Kitchen and WC facilities in the back of the south aisle; Bottom: The nave with Victorian pews, the font, and the organ under the church tower.*

# RUNNING

## Team

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St Laurence's is a member of the Four Church Benefice, a group of churches with the villages of Fowlmere, Shepreth, and Thriplow, all geographically close to Foxton. The team includes rector who also works in the churches of the Four Church Benefice, two churchwardens, PCC secretary treasurer, and commissioned occasional preacher.

## Religious Services

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As a member of the Four Church Benefice, the worship pattern at St Laurence's reflects the collaborative ethos between the villages. St Laurence's holds services on the first three Sundays of a month that appeal to a different worship styles and age groups, for example, Holy Communion is held on the first and third Sundays (average attendance of 18 people), and a service designed to appeal to all ages on the second Sunday (average attendance 30). The all age service has been very popular with young families and *'is much more charismatic'*, says Revd Angela Melaniphy. Acknowledging the fall in St Laurence's congregation, the church is *'trying to revitalise faith here'*, for example, by encouraging local churchgoers to attend their parish village church at least once a month as part of their Christian duty.

Sharing services across the Four Church Benefice, a Celtic communion service is held on the fourth Sunday every other month, and a fifth Sunday service is delivered once a year. The biggest congregation (between 50-150 people) gathers on festival services, especially Christmas.





Top row: Church events for school children (Photo by Foxton Primary School [www.foxtonprimary.co.uk](http://www.foxtonprimary.co.uk)).  
Village Scarecrow Festival (Middle rows photos by Matthew Mellor [www.flickr.com/photos/matthewmellor](http://www.flickr.com/photos/matthewmellor); Bottom-left photo by Royston Crow newspaper [www.royston-crow.co.uk](http://www.royston-crow.co.uk); Bottom-right photo 'Why did the whale swallow Jonah?' by St Laurence Foxton).



*Rood screen details. Opposite page:  
Lady chapel and the children's corner.*

## Fundraising

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**Repair and Maintenance Group.** The Foxton village group STREAM (the St Laurence Trust for Restoration and Maintenance) raises funds specifically for the repair and maintenance of the fabric of the St Laurence's church building. STREAM's events have included a village open day, coffee mornings, quiz nights and a popular 'Bring and Share' lunch with a variety of entertainment. The church relies on the help of the STREAM to fund repairs.

“ [People] think that the church is rich, they think that the church has lots of money, and they simply are not aware that every penny we have comes from the people who worship here. So, we try to educate them through articles.”

**Revd Angela Melaniphy**  
Rector

**Village Scarecrow Festival.** St Laurence's is the main organiser of the autumn village scarecrow festival (*see Events*) that generates between £2,000 and £3,000 per year.



### Income Generation

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**Concerts.** A member of St Laurence Foxton, a former music teacher, helps to organise occasional concerts and invites former music students to perform in the church.

**Rental Income.** St Laurence's welcomes the idea of renting out the church building to groups, for example, for art, drama, music classes, performing arts. Exceptions, however, include groups not compatible with Christian faiths, inimical to the doctrines of the Church of England, and overnight events such as champing (church camping).

**Open Garden Scheme.** The Foxton village participates in the bi-annual Open Gardens Scheme organised by the Foxton Gardens Association and run voluntarily by gardening enthusiasts. The St Laurence's church contributes by providing refreshments for visitors as the convenient location in the High Street makes it one of the central tea stops.

### Communications

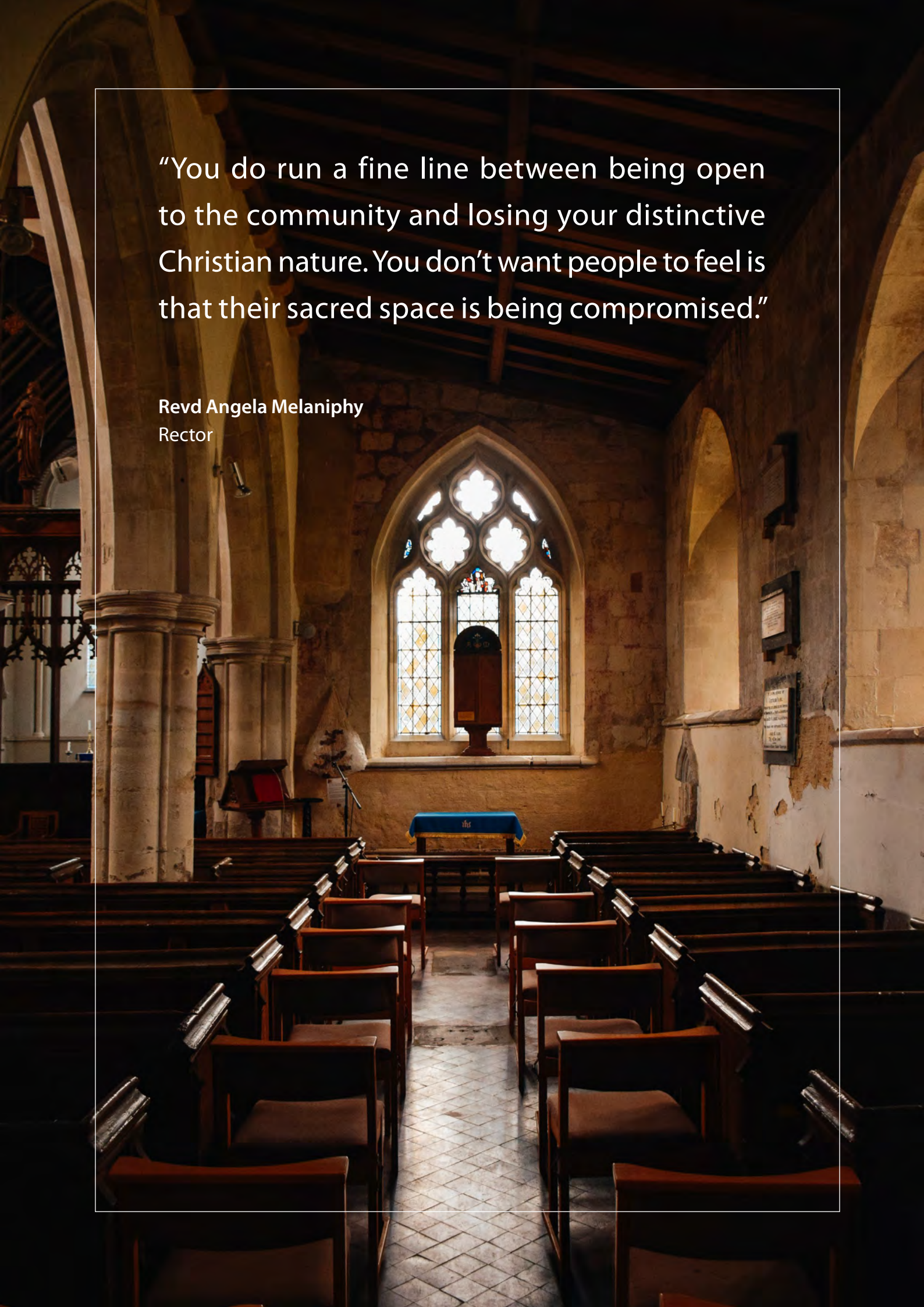
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St Laurence Foxton publishes a weekly notice for the church congregation and the Four Church Benefice website includes a page for St Laurence's. In addition, St Laurence's produces *The Laurentian*, a monthly newsletter, which is delivered to subscribers and has a letter from the Rector and dedicated pages. The St Laurence church Visitors Book records compliments and comments from visitors since 1946.

St Laurence's also receives feedback in conversations and from phone calls from residents. To date these typically relate to issues such as the forthcoming events and the condition of the church, graveyard etc.

“You do run a fine line between being open to the community and losing your distinctive Christian nature. You don’t want people to feel is that their sacred space is being compromised.”

Revd Angela Melaniphy  
Rector



# REACH

## Events

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**Village Scarecrow Festival.** Members of St Laurence's church organise the biennial Foxton Scarecrow Festival in October. The public is invited to wander through Foxton village, explore hand-made scarecrow figurines of various shapes and characters, and participate in a variety of fundraising activities. The church provides refreshments, hot soup, tea and cakes. The event culminates in the St Laurence's church in the evening with a prize giving ceremony for the best scarecrows and Foxton Singers performance of Disney songs. Income is generated from the sale of scarecrow festival programmes at the church and village shop (*On Scarecrow Festival fundraiser, see REACH Ely case study: St Mary the Virgin, Linton*).

**Activity Group.** The Foxton Singers group involves several members of the church. The Foxton Singers repertoire is not church-oriented and the group positions itself as secular though it was formed to support the worship of the St Laurence's church. At present, the links with the church are less strong but the group performs at Carol Services and support funerals and weddings.

## Engagement

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**The Help Group.** In addition to STREAM, the Help Group is run by churchwardens and other church members. Events include, for example, tea and coffee mornings, soup lunches, exhibitions, and popular outings.

**Youth work and collaboration.** The St Laurence's church personnel, in particular the rector, are well-known in the local schools and the church as an educational resource. Students visit the church to learn about the history of their parish church, architecture, artefacts, Holy Communion, and together with their family members participate in services and ceremonies.

**Community survey.** As part of the current mission development planning, a village survey is under consideration to find out their views on how the church may best serve the needs of the local community.

# REFLECTIONS

## Challenges

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### Church congregation decline

The parish demographic profile is predominantly senior, and since 2015 there has been a significant reduction in the church's electoral roll and income. The small congregation has thus far precluded the organisation of community outreach and larger scale events, such as, summer fete or open day.

### Aligning income generation with congregation values

While other church communities have experimented with generating rental income from letting church buildings to exercise and keep fit groups (See REACH Ely case study: *St Philip Romsey Cambridge*), St Laurence's has attempted to host a number of community groups including soup lunches, messy church, a mental health support group but the deficiencies of the building have meant this has all failed. At present, the church is not be able to host community groups until the problems of heating, lighting and disabled access are adequately addressed.

### Church building condition

The St Laurence's building is made mostly of clunch, a soft, chalky limestone. Repair works are needed to replace the south door and prevent crumbling in the chancel. Running costs and the parish share have caused concerns over sufficient funding for maintenance despite having restricted funds for maintenance.



**Modernisation of church facilities**

Further improvements in church facilities are required to increase church building use and income generation potential, for example, installation of a new noticeboard, public address equipment (microphones, speakers), storage facilities, lighting and heating systems. In addition, there is potential to rearrange the space in the nave and the aisles and install soundproof glass partitions with folding doors along the south transepts near the arches. This

would increase flexibility of church building use, for example, to create a children's workspace and meeting rooms.

**Attachment to church fixtures**

The modernisation of church facilities would be more effective with the removal of the medieval pews, however, community attachment to the pews is strong and restrictions on pew removal on heritage grounds are currently in place.

“Most people don't go to church, and the church they don't go to is the Church of England, by which I mean that they own it but they don't come to it. So, in a village the church belongs to the villagers, they very much see it as their church, particularly here – there's the graveyard, they see it as where their family is buried. There's an extensive history in the church, so they feel that they own the church. They don't choose to be a part of the life of the church community but if we plan alterations to the building that potentially change its character it can cause great upset.”

**Revd Angela Melaniphy**

Rector

### Lessons Learned

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#### To involve lay people in running church services

Across the Four Church Benefice, the rector Revd Angela Melaniphy is the only ordained minister in the four parishes. In light of the shortage of licensed lay ministers, the lay people assist in running services, for example, the morning prayer on the first Sunday of a month is held by a trained lay person and the lay team assists working with the rector to run the all age service.

#### To maintain and strengthen community connections

The small congregation makes it especially important that St Laurence Foxton reaches out for support to the community. Success has been achieved by engaging village volunteers in the church cleaning and flower rotas. After the modernisation of church facilities has been completed, it is hoped that volunteers will come forward to organise tea and coffee after church services.

“Historically, there are people who are very connected with the church. If we have a maintenance and spring-cleaning day, people from the village come and help because it’s their building – but they don’t engage in the worship. I see it in all my villages, in all of the villages you have people who come regularly to clean the church and never come to a service... There is something in the rural psyche that says that actually caring for the church is part of my community service, but they don’t link it much into the religious side of the church.”

**Revd Angela Melaniphy**  
Rector



**To allow time for new initiatives to take root**

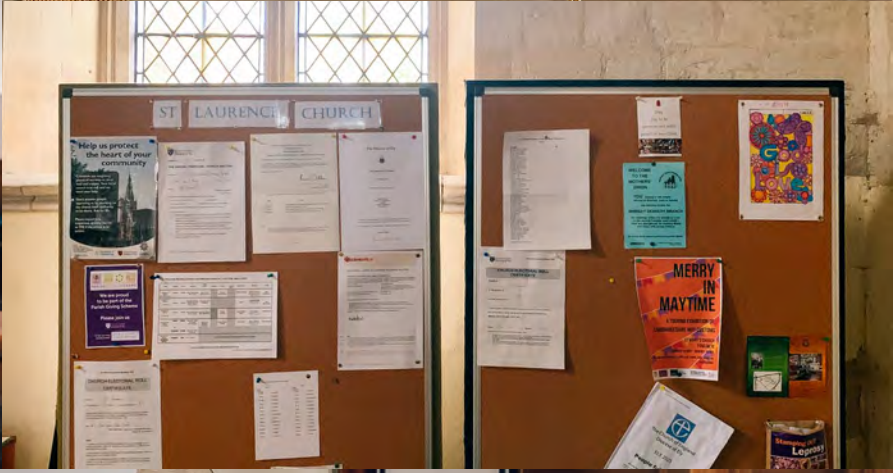
Preparing the congregation and community for the prospect of pew removal is a lengthy process due to feelings of attachment to church artefacts. Further, pew removal needs to be managed in conjunction with the diocese and the national conservation bodies.

**To learn from collaborating with other churches and be thankful to volunteers**

All Saints, Shepreth, a member of the Four Church Benefice, organised an afternoon tea to thank local volunteers who keep the church clean, graveyard tidy and arrange flowers in the church. This idea has been adopted by Foxton PCC that plans to organise an afternoon tea for volunteers in the church once the modernisation of facilities is completed.

**To create a living church**

In small villages with an older demographic profile, like Foxton, close church community engagement is fundamental to church survival. The St Laurence's church is planning to further invest in local community engagement to identify ways for the church to support the community and generate income for church building use.



Top: High Altar. Middle: The model of St Laurence's church carved by Charles Impey, a Victorian farmworker; Information boards in the church. Bottom: Mixed seating in the south aisle.

“I think what you have to do with a building, if you’re trying to make it flexible, is to respect its history, its architecture, pay respect to it, but incorporate it in what you’re doing.”

**Revd Angela Melaniphy**  
Rector

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