

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ST MARY & ST JOHN HINXTON



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: Colourful kneelers arranged on pews at St Mary and St John Hinxton.

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ST MARY & ST JOHN HINXTON

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Granta

Address: Church Green, Hinxtton,
Cambridge CB10 1RS

Joint website of three parishes:
www.hinkledux.com



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade II* listed building; Tower Room; New heating, sound, and lighting systems; No kitchen and WC facilities; Open churchyard; Small car park; Norman north doorway; Jacobean pulpit; Medieval stained glass; Millennium Window; Hatchments; Brasses

Congregation to Population Ratio: 21 / 334

Fundraising: The Friends of St Mary and St John, Hinxtton; Village fete; Garden Evening; Quiz nights; Bingo evenings; Food evenings; Silent auctions; Restoration appeal

Income Generation: Donations and grants

Communications: Website; Village newspaper; Noticeboard; Posters and leaflet; Visitors' Book; Guide for newcomers; Pew sheet; Book

Community Engagement: Art and craft exhibition; Tudor Fest in 2019; Garden event; Choral evenings; After-service coffee; Youthinc; Work party; Cleaning rota.

ROOTS

Profile

Located on the banks of the River Cam, the small picturesque village of Hinxton occupies just over 1,500 acres on the borders of Cambridgeshire and Essex. It is situated some 5 miles (8 km) to the north-west of the market town of Saffron Walden and 9 miles (14 km) south of Cambridge. Its narrow High Street, by-passed more than three centuries ago, contains many fine examples of half-timbered, medieval houses. The village lies between two major motorways – the M11 and the A11 and there are railway stations nearby, at Whittlesford and Great Chesterford, on the busy Cambridge to London line.

The 2011 census records a population of 320. The village and the surrounding area has come under a great deal of pressure in recent years as the potential location for large numbers of new houses. Hinxton Hall, sitting on the southern edge of the village, is the home of the world-renowned Wellcome Trust Genome Campus, which now houses an extensive 125-acre campus of research laboratories and conference facilities.

There is no shop or post office in the village although these facilities are available in nearby Duxford (*see REACH Ely case study Duxford*) and Ickleton. The village has one public house and a well-used and well-maintained village hall that hosts yoga classes, the National Childbirth Trust activities, bingo nights, coffee mornings and private parties. A small lending library has been set up in a redundant telephone box. The village's British Legion association was notable for having, for a number of years, sold the largest numbers of poppies per head of population in Cambridgeshire in the lead up to Remembrance Sunday. Hinxton village has fully subscribed allotments and a playground.

There is evidence of the occupation of this land as far back as the Neolithic period, and the Romans were particularly active in this area. Hinxton Watermill, a 17th-century working watermill located on the River Cam, is open to the public on certain days of the year.





Clockwise from top: View of St Mary and St John Hinxton from churchyard; Tower clock; South entrance porch; Oak entrance door; Church tower.



Building

The parish church of St Mary and St John is a Grade II* listed building dating back to 1150, but there may have been a church here as early as 1080. The church is located at the centre of the village and occupies the position of the first church built in Hinxton and granted to Barnwell Priory in 1092. The church is constructed of flint rubble with Barnack limestone and clunch dressings; the roofs are plain tiled and leaded. The lower part of the sturdy flint and rubble tower is Early English, but the upper stage with the spire is a 15th-century addition. The building consists of a chancel, nave, south aisle, Lady Chapel, south porch and a western tower with lead-covered spire that contains a clock and two bells that were first hung in 1903. The bells are no longer rung as they are considered too damaged although the tower has been strengthened and preserved.

Inside the church, the nave is filled with colour from the coloured kneelers propped up on the pew shelves. *'It's lovely having them like that, isn't it? It makes the whole place look friendly'*, says Margaret Malcolm, churchwarden. The pews are Victorian, and there are no plans to remove these. Some of the renovations include an upper room, the Tower Room, which has been added

and is used for PCC meetings. A new heating system was added in 2004 although this is now in need of some repair. The organ, dating from the 1880s, has been refurbished. The church has a new sound system and lighting, and replastered and redecorated walls in recent years. The roof has been completely refurbished and the external stonework is being repaired. A major overhaul of the West Window at a cost of around £12,000 is currently underway. One of the buttresses at the north-east corner of the chancel (exterior) was found to be unsound with evidence of some cracks appearing. It was discovered that some of the original foundations had been inadvertently and adversely affected, probably when the French Drain was created in the early 2000s. This situation has been overcome with some underpinning.

The building can accommodate 150 people. Without kitchen and WC facilities, the church has limited opportunities for rentals and events. Hinxton church is always kept unlocked in the daytime – mostly from 9 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. – but in winter may be locked earlier. Although there have been some thefts in the village, the church has not suffered from these in recent years. The churchyard is still open for burials. There is a small car park, rented from the diocese.



Opposite page: Chancel with East window and memorials. Above clockwise: View of the nave from above; Tower Room; Staircase to Tower Room under the tower; Pews and the font.

Artefacts

The oak entrance doors in the south porch are silvery with age, and the Norman north doorway is now blocked but can be seen from the outside. Inside the building, the top section of the window beside the Jacobean pulpit contains some medieval stained glass and there are two panels of richly coloured ancient glass in the window in the south aisle. There is also a tiny piece of medieval glass at the top of the window which is behind the organ. A stained glass window under the tower – Millennium Window (*see page 14*) to commemorate the Millennium – was created by a Lincolnshire artist Glenn Carter who was commissioned to illustrate topographical features of the village: a trout fish from the River Cam, a partridge bird (Hinxton Hall was famous for its partridge shooting), a poppy that draws on the church's association with the local branch of the British Legion, willow leaves, and the river Cam itself.

The closed-off staircase behind the pulpit once led to a rood loft. The Hinxton brass on the floor of the Lady Chapel, dated 1416, is of Sir Thomas de Skelton and his wives, Margaret and Katherine. The fine central figure is in full Lancastrian plate armour, as worn at the battle of Agincourt. Hinxton church has seven diagonal hatchments (heraldic tablets), two of which hang above the font. The hatchment on the left is for Edward Green, 1770-1804. The hatchment on the right is for Charles Raikes of Hinxton, who died without issue on 16th February 1828. The organ was built by a local firm and dates back to 1887 when it was built to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. It has been restored in recent times.

RUNNING

Team

The parish church of Hinxton is part of a group of churches that also include St Mary Magdalene church in Ickleton and St Peter in Duxford. The ministry team of St Mary and St John Hinxton includes the vicar, an associate priest responsible for three churches (Hinxton, Ickleton, and Duxford) and working closely with the priest at Whittlesford, for example, running a shared Lent group, and a licensed lay minister.

There is an active Friends of Hinxton Church group as well as a PCC. The church is under the patronage of Jesus College, Cambridge and has an informal relationship with Peterhouse (a college at the University of Cambridge) through a member of the village community.

Religious Services

Services are held at Hinxton on three Sundays of every month – an Evensong is held on the first Sunday at 6.30 p.m. (5 p.m. in winter months). On the third Sunday, there is Parish Communion at 10 a.m., which is celebrated with hymns and sermon, using a contemporary language service. On the fourth Sunday, the church holds an 8 a.m. Communion. The third Sunday service typically

attracts about 25 worshippers. The 8 a.m. Communion is attended by fewer parishioners. Like most other churches, services at Christmas, Remembrance Sunday and Easter are well attended.

A joint service with all three churches in the group, including the attending congregations from Whittlesford and Pampisford, is sometimes held on the fifth Sunday. This service moves around, and the venue is announced in the pew sheet.

The congregation consists largely of people in their 60s and 70s. A junior church group in Hinxton, Godly Play, has closed as the number of children attending became very low. Children's groups and activities are offered at other churches within the group, in particular at Duxford and Ickleton.

Covid-19 impact. Church services and other activities were temporarily suspended during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. During the period of the national lockdown, the church was keeping in touch with people by **livestreaming** Sunday services via **Zoom**. Priest's reflections, service sheets and hymns as well as contact phones of the priest and churchwardens were shared on the church **website**.

Parish Share

In 2019, parish share expenditure was approximately £15,000.

Fundraising

The Friends of St Mary and St John, Hinxton was set up in the late 1980s by the then resident of Church Green Cottage specifically to care for the church and churchyard for the benefit of the public. The charity has 33 life members and 6 annual members. The group has raised many thousands of pounds in support of a whole range of projects including re-roofing, redecorating and the heating of the building. As a result, the church is a very 'habitable' building which was not always the case. The Friends have also supported the installation of an improved church alarm system, which

has ensured full insurance cover. Funds are raised through social activities in the village and by appeals to grant-making organisations.

The **Village fete** is run jointly by the PCC and the Friends of St Mary and St John, Hinxton. The fete in 2019 featured a dog show, book and plant stalls, bottle stall and various traditional games. The event raises funds for the restoration and upkeep of the parish church.

Hinxton church is involved in a range of other fundraising events, such as **Garden Evenings** (*see Events*), **quiz nights**, international **food evenings** and **silent auctions**. An appeal had been made to the village in the past for a specific restoration project, but the team are reluctant to ask the community for funds on a regular basis.

“Village people who attend fundraising events are very generous with their support of the church.”

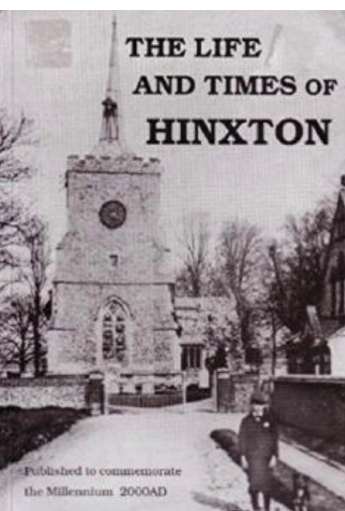
Andrew Walker and Margaret Malcolm
Churchwardens

Income Generation

Donations and grants. A local charity, the Ann Howsden Trust, which makes Christmas gifts and heating disbursements to local pensioners, makes a **donation** of around £2,500 per year for improvements to the building, including church heating and churchyard maintenance. The church is not currently hired out to external organisations, mainly because of the lack of kitchen and WC facilities. Several **grants** have been received for repairs to the fabric. An application for a mobile phone mast had not been successful.

Communications

The church has a section on the **website** maintained by the three parishes, www.hinkledux.com, which is still under construction. In addition, there is also information about the church on the parish council's website. An independent **village newsletter**, *The Hinxtton News*, run by volunteers, features a page dedicated to Hinxtton church matters. The PCC has recently erected a new **noticeboard** and **posters** are placed in locations around the village to publicise services and events. The church also circulates a **leaflet** round the village at Christmas and Easter. There is a well-used **Visitors' Book** in the church and a **Welcome Pack** is given to each new resident. A monthly **pew sheet** is available in the church and on the website. A **book** on local history, *The Life and Times of Hinxtton* (2000), written by Virginia Walker, the churchwarden's wife, is on sale in the church.



"It's lovely to be part of a church which is also part of the community. Events which the church put on are always supported by the village; and equally events instigated by the village are supported by the church. Most people are really glad to have such a beautiful church building, even to the extent that a number of non-churchgoers are on the cleaning rota and gladly take part in the churchyard tidying days."

Andrew Walker and Margaret Malcolm
Churchwardens



REACH

Community

Community support. The village community is very supportive of the church and the events held there. An annual **work party** takes place to maintain the churchyard and there is a **cleaning rota**. The cleaners also provide flowers for the church. It is noticeable that at least half of the **volunteers** are non-churchgoers. Members of the village hall committee and the church do their best to be mutually supportive.

Events

Art and Craft Exhibition. A Hinxton artist holds a biennial exhibition of her work and those of local artists in the church each November.

Tudor Feast was held in 2019 in and around the village hall. The event included live music and lots of food and games for all the family, including stocks for the unruly.

The annual **Garden Evening** is a summer party held in one of the village gardens and raises significant funds for the Friends of the church. Volunteers supply food and raffle prizes for the event. Almost £1,500 was raised in 2019 from ticket sales, bar and raffle.

As stated earlier, regular quiz nights, bingo evenings and a summer fete form part of the regular village calendar.

Choral evenings. Peterhouse choir visits the church of St Mary and St John from time to time. A retiring collection is made, half of which goes to Peterhouse and half to the church. The team is keen to develop more music events, although there are a number of other venues that host concerts in the area.

Engagement

After-service coffee. Refreshments are provided after services, although most of the components have to be brought in because of the lack of kitchen facilities.

Youthinc is a deanery-wide initiative for 9-13 year olds. This discussion and activity group meets monthly in the evening for a mixed diet of guided conversation, exploration of questions of faith and doubt, of prayer, of Christian practical action, and of the big questions which emerge for children as they become more mature.



Hinxton Tudor Feast 2019 (Photo courtesy of Philip Lowndes, source: www.hinxton-pc.org.uk)



1st row: Church tower with noticeboard; Hinxton hatchments. 2nd row: Rood screen and one of the hatchments. Bottom clockwise: View of the Tower Room; View of the nave from the chancel; Seating arrangement in the nave.

REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Income generation

In common with many other small congregations, it is a challenge to raise the parish share from donations alone. The Friends of St Mary and St John, Hinxton, actively raise funds to finance structural repairs and improvements to the building but this money is not used for its mission. The church building is not suitable for rentals because of the lack of kitchen and WC facilities and the village hall offers the space for this.

Youth engagement

The number of children attending Hinxton church is low and the junior church group is no longer running as a result. Children from the village are invited to events held in other parishes within the group, e.g. Messy Church and Lego Easter at Duxford.

Small and senior congregation

Those regularly attending church are largely in their 60s and 70s and although the village is very supportive of the ongoing presence of the church this will present challenges in terms of income and volunteer numbers in years to come.

Lack of facilities

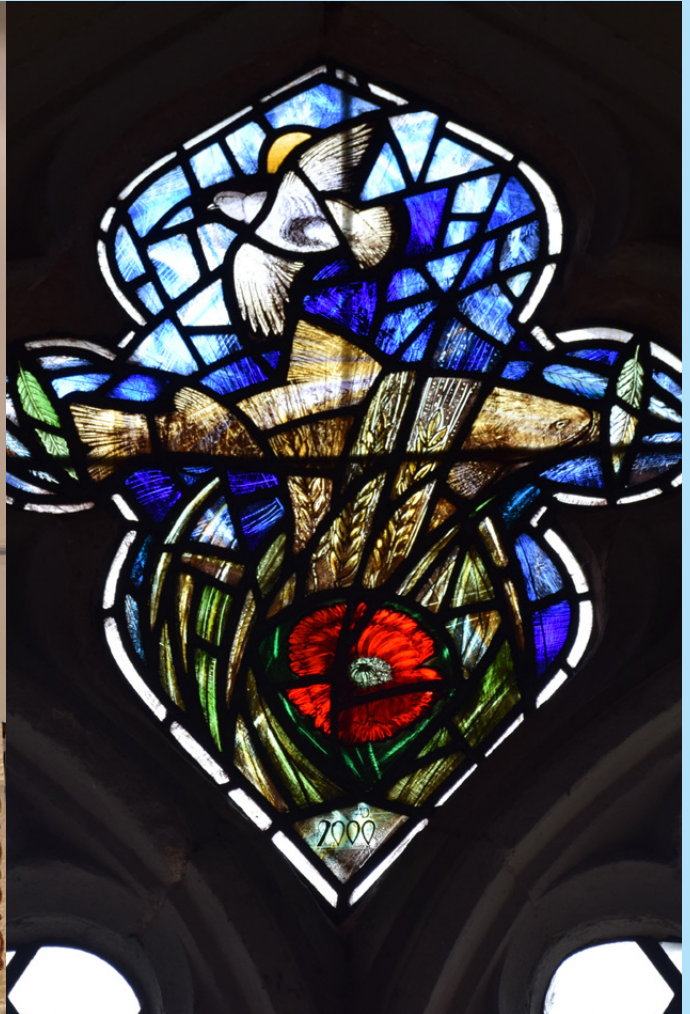
The lack of a WC facility presents difficulties for the elderly and those attending services such as funerals who may have travelled long distances. It also limits the events that can be held in the church. Although the public house and the village hall offer the use of their facilities, the PCC will need to address this issue. However, adapting the building to accommodate a WC facility will not be easy. Food preparation has to be carried out offsite because there is no kitchen at the church building.

Maintenance of assets

The maintenance of this medieval building is an ongoing challenge and grants are difficult to come by. The PCC has to juggle its priorities in terms of allocating funds to repairs. The hatchments require approximately £10,000-worth of renovation, for example, and the restoration of the West window costs £12,000.

Small ministry and management team

The former vicar had to run services in a number of different churches and so for a new vicar this can be a challenge to maintain continuity and build relationships. Exploring opportunities for funding is also time-consuming and grants are not always forthcoming, even when applications are made. With additional support, the PCC and the Friends might be able to make more of their relationships with the University of Cambridge and local businesses such as the Wellcome Genome campus.



Top: High Altar and the East window; Millennium Window under the tower. Bottom: One of the stained glass windows.

Lessons Learned

To work in partnership

The PCC and the Friends have an informal, reciprocal partnership with the village hall, and this has generated useful funding and volunteer assistance for both. The patronage of Peterhouse, Cambridge has led to choral evenings that have raised funds for the church. There is perhaps scope to further develop the relationship with Jesus College, Cambridge.

To create a living church

Hinxton church has increased the number of events held there, including concerts and exhibitions. There are plans to do more of this in the future although there are constraints caused by the layout and size of the building.

To integrate the church and the community

The local community is very supportive of church events and enjoys having the church at the heart of the community. The PCC have found that good communication and publicity is vital in bringing the village into the church. Many non-churchgoers attend events organised by the Friends and also volunteer, e.g. to clean the church, bring flowers, or tidy the churchyard.

To upgrade the facilities within the church

The addition of an efficient heating system had made the Hinxton church building much more comfortable for users. However, any future changes will need to be carefully managed. The addition of a WC facility and a kitchen in the future would make the church more usable for events.



“What tells you that the church is successful? If the initiated people in the church feel happy and content with the offering of the church, that must be some sort of measure of success. The clergy really have to realise that they’re in the marketing business.”

Andrew Walker
Churchwarden

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