

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ST MARY BARTLOW

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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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: Detail of the medieval wall painting depicting St Christopher and Christ-Child on his shoulder.

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ST MARY BARTLOW

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Granta

Address: Church Lane, Bartlow,
Cambridge CB21 4PR

Website: [https://e-voice.org.uk/
bartlow/st-mary-s-church/](https://e-voice.org.uk/bartlow/st-mary-s-church/)

Three Counties Charity Walk website:
www.bartlow3countieswalk.co.uk



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade I listed; Round Norman tower; Internal medieval wall paintings; 18th century urn in the churchyard; Sundial; Art-nouveau metal gravehead

Congregation to Population Ratio: 16/110

Fundraising: The Three Counties Charity Walk; St Mary's Church Restoration Fund; Land Exchange Project; Church Covenant Scheme; Micro-fundraising

Income Generation: Rental income

Communications: Village newsletter *Bartlow Bulletin*; Guide for village newcomers *Welcome to Bartlow*; Church website; The Three Counties Charity Walk website and Facebook; Church Visitors Book; Information boards in the church

Community Engagement: Bartlow Village Association; The Three Counties Charity Walk; Church and Community Volunteers; Grave Adoption Initiative.

ROOTS



Profile

Located twelve miles south-east of Cambridge, Bartlow is one of the smallest parishes in Cambridgeshire with a population of 110 people (2011 census). The village is bordered by the parishes of Horseheath (350) to the north, Castle Camps (684) and Shudy Camps (338) to the east, and Linton (4,525) (2011 census) to the west. In the Domesday Book, Bartlow was probably part of Castle Camps estate. The Bartlow Hills, the largest Roman burial mounds north of the Alps rediscovered in the 19th century, is set in the village. The River Granta links Bartlow with Cambridge and a footpath to Bartlow Hills lies near the churchyard.

Building

St Mary Bartlow is a Grade I listed building with the capacity to accommodate approximately 130 people. The most prominent features are the round Norman tower – a remnant of what is believed to be the original church dating back to the late-11th/early-12th century and the later medieval windows. The nave and chancel date from about 13th century. The three church bells, still in use, were installed around 1440 AD.

Artefacts

There are the remains of decorative medieval wall paintings. The period following the Reformation (1517-1648) saw many figurative paintings destroyed. At St Mary's, three of them have been uncovered with some in poor paint condition: a scene of St George (the paint has hardly survived) and the Dragon (clearly visible). Scenes of St Christopher and Christ-Child on his shoulder, St Michael weighing souls on the Day of Judgement with the Virgin Mary interceding for sinners are on the north wall. The plain white colour of the walls is a typical invention of the 19th century. In the churchyard, there are an 18th century urn and an art-nouveau metal grave head.



Clockwise: The stained glass of the East window; The nave with the medieval wall paintings; The Bartlow Hills (Photo by St Mary Bartlow); The view of the Norman circular tower and the north doorway with yew trees.

RUNNING

Team

Bartlow is a member of the Linton team, a 'family of villages' interlinked with rural settings of Castle Camps, Shudy Camps, Horseheath, and Linton (See *REACH Ely case study: St Mary the Virgin Linton*). At present, St Mary Bartlow is served by a non-stipendiary vicar Reverend Lesley Gore, a retired priest with permission to officiate. Although serving the Linton Team, she has special responsibilities to St Mary Bartlow. Lesley has lived in Linton for 38 years and is well-known in the area. Currently she delivers Sunday services in St Mary Bartlow and Fulbourn Hospital, ministers pastorally in Linton and Bartlow, and carries out other duties within the team. In addition, the church rector lives in Linton and provides supervisory cover and two churchwardens volunteer in Bartlow.

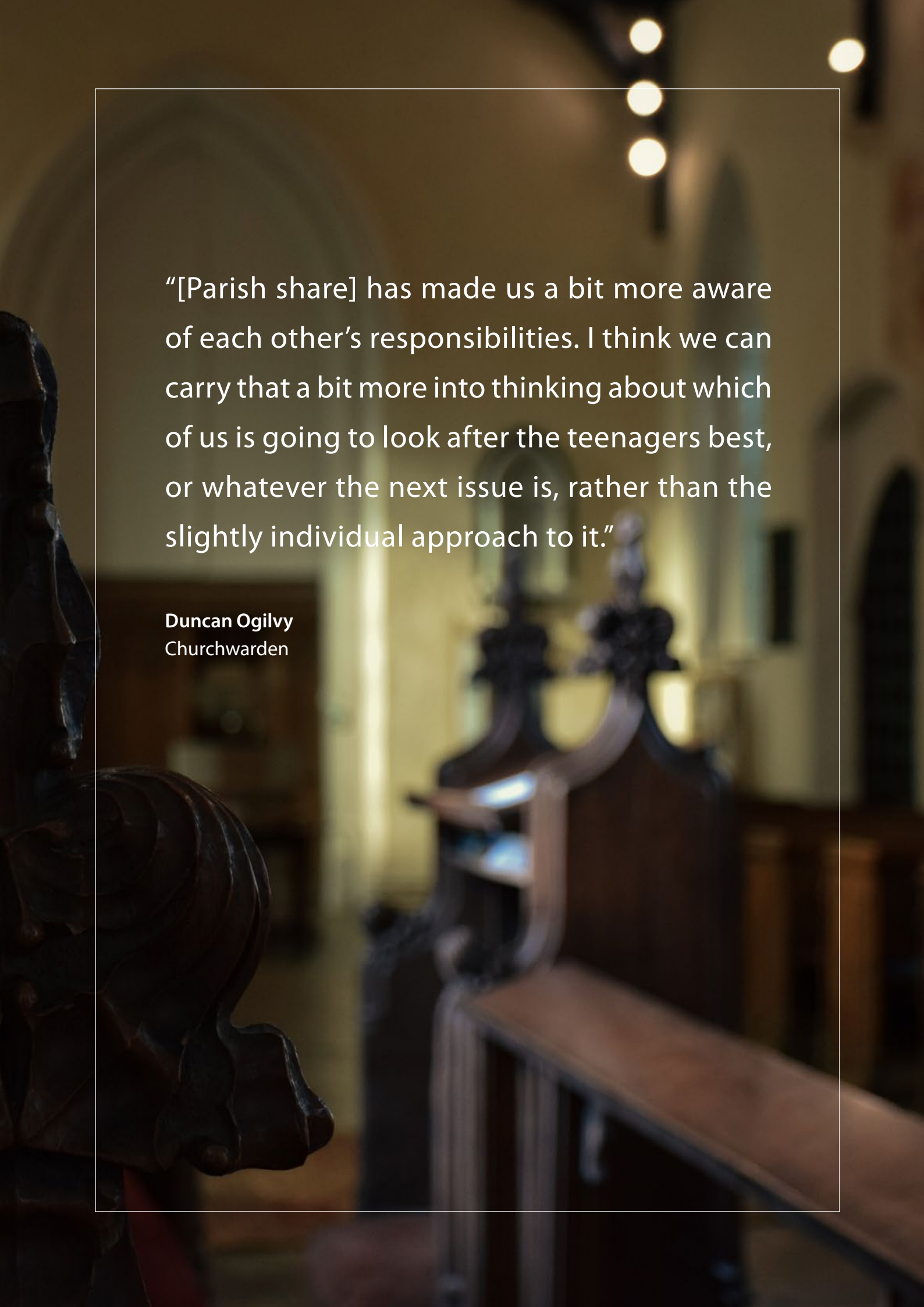
Religious Services

The St Mary's church holds services with an Evensong and a Holy Communion nearly every week. On the fourth Sunday of each month St Mary Bartlow has a congregation-led service. The church follows the guidance from the Church of England for 'DIY services' with a more attention to special prayers on the day. Since St Mary's is a member of the Linton team of the other four parishes, the church encourages people to attend

services not only in their own village but also in other churches within the team. A House for Duty post in Castle Camps is filled by a part-time retired vicar who provides a service a month for one of the three small villages and in Linton for the fourth one. St Mary Bartlow has experimented with a variety of service arrangements, usually linked to Linton in various ways. For example, once a month a family service, led by Cathy Watts, a Lay Reader who lives in Linton and is part of the team, is held at Bartlow.

Parish Share

Like other parishes in England, Bartlow participates in contributing to the Parish Share to support the mission and ministry of the Church in the Diocese. As a small parish, Bartlow had difficult discussions about the Parish Share in the past and decided to apportion the Share for the whole Linton Team slightly differently. In addition, it was decided to create a reserve fund within the team in case any of the team parishes has difficulty meeting its share. The fundraising events (see below) are a good way to bring the team together. Funds from the annual Three Counties Charity Walk (see below) go solely for the restoration fund.

A blurred background of a church interior. In the foreground, a dark, ornate wooden sculpture is partially visible on the left. The background shows rows of wooden pews and a statue on a pedestal, all softly out of focus. Warm, ambient lighting is visible, with some circular light fixtures in the upper right.

“[Parish share] has made us a bit more aware of each other’s responsibilities. I think we can carry that a bit more into thinking about which of us is going to look after the teenagers best, or whatever the next issue is, rather than the slightly individual approach to it.”

Duncan Ogilvy
Churchwarden



Fundraising

St Mary's Church Restoration Fund. The PCC strives to raise money and £300,000 was raised largely from grants between 1999 and 2019.

Land Exchange Project. The present priority for the church is to exchange a piece of land that the church owns for two adjacent stables. On completion, the PCC plans to install a kitchenette, a WC, and a new door leading into the churchyard to facilitate greater use of the buildings. Although the local community has expressed a concern on additional financial burden from the stable refurbishment, architectural plans have been submitted to South Cambridgeshire District Council for approval prior to submitting an application to the National Lottery Community Fund. The estimated cost of the project is £50,000. It has been greenlighted by the parish meeting and the Bartlow Village Association. The hope is that the initiative to be funded as a community project not a church project since the outcome is to make a better use of the church building by the whole community.

Church Covenant Scheme. Village residents are encouraged to register a Church Covenant.

Micro Fundraising. Online micro-fundraising, e.g., JustGiving.com, generates approximately £250 per annum; High net worth community members are invited to establish a **standing order commitment** to raise unrestricted income for the church. A churchwarden notes that corporate donors are more comfortable sponsoring a building when compared to funding other opportunities.



Income Generation

Rental income. Periodically, St Mary's serves as a polling station for a small fee.

Communications

The church webpage provides information about the village and church history, current events, useful contacts, village transport, local artists, maps, newsletters, church artefacts, and photo albums. **The Charity Walk website** provides useful information for walkers with a photo gallery.

Bartlow Bulletin: the village newsletter.

Welcome to Bartlow: a bulletin for village newcomers, which lists useful contacts of the church and village amenities and provides introductory information about neighbourhood watch scheme and the Bartlow Village Association.

Information boards in the church on the history of the village, St Mary's, wall restoration, and architectural artefacts.

Church Visitors' Book records travellers' notes complimenting the unique building, artefacts, and appreciating for being open during the day.

REACH

Community

Bartlow Village Association.

This is a non-religious community group open to all adults who lives, works or worships in Bartlow. The Association raises money by means of a village lottery, tickets for which cost 50p per week. Half of the money raised is donated to the church and the other half is spent on village functions such as a Barn Dance, a summer party, and excursions. Recent day trips were organised to London, a sugar beet factory, and brewery. In these types of social events, Bartlow Village Association prioritises their affordability, accessibility and inclusivity for everyone.

Events

The Three Counties Charity Walk.

The St Mary's church organises the Three County Charities Walk, a popular annual fundraising event held on the Sunday of the first May Bank holiday for the past sixteen years. The Walk is a 13.5 mile walk for walking enthusiasts in the countryside that covers three counties – Cambridgeshire, Suffolk and Essex. Financially, the Walk is an important fundraiser for St Mary Bartlow: funds are usually generated by having sponsors, participants subscribed to walk, a bar, a raffle, and payments for stalls on the day.

The Walk is for all abilities and concludes in a farmyard gathering, where a raffle and

a bar are organised. Church information boards show the church plans and target restoration fund for the year to come. Usually, around a thousand people participate in the Walk. As the organiser, the church needs to hire and install WCs, marquees, and other facilities. To reduce the risks of a bad weather cancellation, and having no reserve fund, the church sells advertising space on the walkers map to generate sufficient funds to cover the infrastructure costs.

In 2018, a record number of over 970 people participated in the Walk and very favourable feedback was received from participants. The event has generated over £18,000, which is equally distributed to three local causes: Addenbrooke's Hospital, Linton Health Centre, and the St Mary's Church Restoration Fund. Over the past 16 years, the Walk has raised more than £150,000. This restricted funding can be used to leverage grant funding.

Engagement

Church and Community Volunteers.

St Mary's Bartlow community support is manifest in 20% of the village population signed up for the church cleaning and flower rotas. In addition, many non-regular attenders come to the church to offer help with various tasks and activities.



Charity Walk's signposting.
Photo by St Mary Bartlow.



Three Counties Charity Walk. Photo by St Mary Bartlow.

“Because we are so small, we seem to have generated a goodwill bank which is much bigger than the Sunday morning church attenders, who may or may not express themselves as Christians, but who feel a warmth or some combination of the important bit of architecture and what goes on within it. I find it hugely reassuring and fortifying that there is that latent support.”

Duncan Ogilvy
Churchwarden



REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Youth Engagement. Bartlow PCC accepts that there are few children and young people involved in the church and village activities. A challenge to go forward is to attract children to church events. At the moment, it is problematic to set active children-friendly activities in the small church because of the fragile artefacts although suggestions considered include a craft children's party.

Community Attachment to Church Fixtures. In relation to church fixtures opinions with regard to the removal of Victorian pews remain divided. The PCC has deferred discussion about the pews until after completion of the building renovations.

Community Attachment to Church Buildings. The community has raised concerns about the additional administrative and financial costs incurred by the renovated church however, the PCC anticipates that the improved facilities will increase the community use of the church. The PCC is heartened that the church buildings arouse strong support from the community.

“But it’s our parish church, we must do what we can to keep it open, if we don’t have the facilities they might close it, and if they close it, we’ll be deprived of our parish church.”

Village resident



Restored medieval wall paintings on the south (top) and north walls (bottom).

Lessons Learned

To engage the community in supporting preservation of the church buildings and artefacts.

The PCC reported that since 2000, St Mary Bartlow has run several projects to conserve and restore the fabric of the building and with the help of the village and fund giving bodies. The projects have included congregation and concerned citizens who help fundraise and keep the small building in the heart of the village in a good shape. For the wall paintings conservation project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, St Mary Bartlow received support from the whole community. People attended concerts, public meetings on the history of the church and the wall paintings, put together the text for the words for the interpretation boards and artwork, helped with the typesetting, and made a screen for the boards. By no means all of those people are church attendees unless it is a particular special occasion and general help with the church.

To invite the community to use the church buildings for non-religious purposes.

Bartlow residents have used the church building as a Village Hall. The vision is to open the church to the broader community. Some pews may be removed to create a bigger open space for various community uses, e.g., sports and hobby group sessions.

To take the church into the community.

In 2018 the church ran its PCC meetings in a local village pub.

To integrate the church and the community.

Bartlow PCC maintains that church and community are inseparable, and it is inappropriate to distinguish between them. The common feeling that PCC member share is that the church should move forward gently, listen to their community and introduce further improvements for the building that reflect the interests of the local people.

To increase opportunities for further church community integration.

In light of the good church family links and church artefacts, the PCC anticipates that there is a scope for a Friends of St Mary's Group.



One of the information boards in the church telling a story of its architectural features



Clockwise: The sundial on the southside of the building; The churchyard; The font, the visitors book, and the information boards.

“We need to be careful to keep the pace of change, keep a consensus around an appropriate pace of change, which is neither too fast to carry people with us, nor too slow to be relevant to the 21st century, and it’s a bit of a balancing act.”

Duncan Ogilvy
Churchwarden

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