

Cambridge Judge Business School

REACH Ely Case Study Series

Reimagining Churches as Community Assets
for the Common Good

ST MARY THE VIRGIN LINTON



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: Altar figurine of St Mary the Virgin with Baby Jesus.

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ST MARY THE VIRGIN LINTON

Church Category: Rural

Deanery: Granta

Address: Church Lane, Linton, Cambridge
CB21 4JX

Website: www.stmaryslinton.org.uk

Scarecrow Festival: [facebook.com/
LintonScarecrowFestival](https://facebook.com/LintonScarecrowFestival)



Summary

Buildings and Artefacts: Grade I listed; Separate Pavilion with kitchenette and facilities; Public Community Peace Garden; The Icknield Way Trail; Marble memorials and monuments; Pews replaced with soft chairs

Congregation to Population Ratio: 101 / 4,525

Fundraising: Scarecrow Summer Festival; Friends of St Mary's; Barn Dance; Various fundraising events through year including concerts, exhibitions and meals

Income Generation: Rental income from the church building and the Pavilion

Communications: Village newspaper; Village posters and noticeboards; Website; Facebook; Email bulletins and leaflets; Information boards in the church

Community Engagement: Scarecrow Summer Festival; Community Peace Garden.

ROOTS

Profile

The village of Linton is on the border of Essex with a population of 4,525 (2011 census). Located eight miles southeast from Cambridge, the village has good transport links to Cambridge. At the northern side of the parish is Chilford Hall, one of England's oldest vineyards established in 1972. The Linton Zoo Conservation Park and gardens, a centre for breeding wildlife and a popular tourist attraction, is on the southern edge of the village. Facilities in Linton include a village hall, small community centre, library, sports pavilion used for social events, infant and junior schools, Linton Village College – secondary education academy, school for those with special needs, children's centre, veterinary surgery, village shops, and three public houses. One of East Anglia's long-distance footpaths – the Icknield Way Trail, also claimed to be 'the oldest road in Britain' – passes through Linton and attracts walkers, horse-riders, and cyclists. The Linton Free Church, the only other church in the village and a member of the United Reformed Church, is a short walk from St Mary the Virgin Linton.

Building

Dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Linton parish church is a Grade I listed building of multiple medieval centuries origin. On the site of the present church, there was a Norman church in the 11th-12th centuries whose parts survive in the present St Mary's. The church tower dates from 1308 when the second church was begun on the site. The perpendicular features evident today date from the 15th century. St Mary the Virgin Linton was extensively renovated in the 19th century and the current interior preserves many of the artefacts. The church, tucked away from the High Street, is accessible via a public footpath and surrounded by a spacious churchyard.





Top: The south porch entrance to the church. Middle: The public footpath off the High Street; The public footpath to the church across the bridge over the River Granta. Bottom: The new noticeboard at the entrance (Photo by Linton church); The East window and the churchyard.

The River Granta runs adjacent to the churchyard. In 2001, St Mary's was affected by serious flood damage. Although some flow improvements were made to the River Granta in the early 21st century, the risk of flooding remains and impacts on the cost of buildings insurance. It was at this time that the majority of fixed pews and seating in the nave were removed and replaced with movable chairs. Further church buildings refurbishment has added new external doors to the north and south porches and installed oak cupboards and shelving at the rear of the church. At present, the building is in good condition and requires only a minor repair work to the stained glass windows to remove the developing rust. The church has recently renovated six bells in the church tower.

St Mary's is open seven days a week during daylight hours. The church is a member of a team of parishes, that also includes Castle Camps, Shudy Camps, Horseheath, and Bartlow (See REACH Ely case study: *St Mary Bartlow*).

The church seating accommodates two hundred people and, for festival services such as Remembrance Day, this is extended to three hundred with some standing. The nave is used for the main church service and Messy Church activities, and the high altar is used for Holy Communion. A regular Thursday service is held in a smaller chapel which is also used on other weekdays for morning and evening prayer. The church building has no kitchen and WC as these are installed in the nearby Pavilion. A public footpath from the churchyard leads to the Community Peace Garden (see below), a

small open-air space with mixed planting and seating.

The Pavilion was built between 1950 and 1960 and is a separate structure behind the main church building. The Pavilion provides a community space with storage, small kitchenette and disabled-friendly facilities. The entrance is wheelchair-accessible. In the 2000s, the Pavilion was raised onto a platform as a precaution against future flooding.


Artefacts

The Grade I listed church building features remaining parts of Norman origin such as an exterior arch near the south porch, a south aisle pillar, the moulding on the inner part of the west doorway, and the three unusual round clerestory windows. Beneath the chancel arch is a black stone monument dated 1558 and dedicated to Sir Philip Parys, a Roman Catholic supporter of Queen Mary.

A large memorial built by the Squire John Millicent (1515-1577), a Civil War hero and a Restoration activist, is situated behind the organ in the Millicent Chapel. The Millicent Memorial depicts the Squire's parents, grandmother, and eleven children. Another prominent artefact in the south aisle is a richly decorated white marble Bacon-Standly monument dated 1792. Other artefacts include the Queen Victoria Memorial Window, small brasses of 20th century worshippers, intricate carved wooden ornamentation on bench ends of the remaining pews, and a large Brass Eagle Lectern.



Clockwise: The nave with chairs; The Pavilion behind the church building; Wheelchair-friendly entrance to the Pavilion; The stained glass window 'Christ with the Woman of Samaria with Angels' by Mary Lowndes (1908) in the south aisle.



“We need to be hospitable to worship of a relatively traditional kind, but with some modern facilities. We want to preserve the ethos and yet create space for more community use.”

Revd Dr Margaret Guite

Team rector of Linton and four parishes
(Castle Camps, Shudy Camps,
Horseheath, and Bartlow)

RUNNING

Team

Apart from the clergy, the Linton parish church employs a part-time (10 hours per week) administrator. Otherwise, it relies entirely on volunteers including the verger.

Religious Services

St Mary the Virgin Linton holds Sunday services with some Sundays having up to three services. More than one hundred parishioners (2.2% of the village population) attend the Sunday services. Additionally, there is a regular Thursday service. The Remembrance Day Service appeals to a cross section of the village and some events have drawn a younger audience such as the school service, organised on Friday mornings, for infant school children, their parents, and carers.

Four times a month, the church of St Mary the Virgin holds Holy Communion services in a care home and in sheltered housing. The church is planning an outdoor service in the summer in the Camping Close (common land) adjacent to infants school and the church in place of the normal Sunday service.



Friday service. Photo by Linton church



*The Bacon-Standly monument
and information boards.*

Fundraising

Friends of St Mary's Group: The Friends of the church was formed in 1988 and reconstituted in 2001 when the flood necessitated immediate action to maintain the fabric of the church building.

The Friends of St Mary's, comprising over 100 members, organises fundraising events, such as concerts and talks, and is open to anybody in the village who wants to support the fabric of the church building. The group adopts a broad interpretation of the fabric of the church building that extends beyond architectural and structural repairs and maintenance. In 2018, the Friends of St Mary's raised £1,613 towards the upkeep of the fabric of the church.

Scarecrow Summer Festival: The three-day weekend festival, which proved popular with the wider village community (see below).

Barn Dance: An occasional barn dance is held in the church building, and the Pavilion is used for the sale of food and drink.

Scarecrow Festival:
The choir, duck race, and
Linton Music Society's
serenade scarecrows
(Photo by Linton church)



Income Generation

Rental income: The church building and the Pavillion are available for hire, and have been used for for music rehearsals and concerts. A traditional user of the church building is the Linton Music Society (now The Linton Music Series).

Communications

The website of St Mary the Virgin Linton details the history of the church and lists upcoming services and events. The church services, events and facilities are advertised in **the village newspaper** *Linton News*, on **Facebook** and on **posters** displayed in the village. Further, a regular **bulletin** is emailed to subscribers. **Leaflets** and **information boards** on the church history and current events are available in the church.

REACH

Community

The Pavilion is used both for church functions, such as after-service coffee and PCC meetings, as well as hired out for non-church related events. The church cannot commit the Pavilion to regular hire for non-church groups as this is prohibited in the founding contract. Any non-church group or individual can hire the Pavilion for a maximum of three times per year. It is planned to build up bookings now.

Community Peace Garden, hidden in what was once waste ground beside the River Granta and the Pavilion, was opened in March 2019. At the opening, funds had been raised through the Parish and District Councils as well as the Co-op Community Fund where people and Co-op members opt-in as to what they should support. The idea behind the project was driven by environmental concerns to care for the area and to make it available to the community for a place of peace and quiet reflection. Contractors developed the hard landscaping and the PCC invited volunteers to plant and nurture the new Garden. The purchase of many of the plants for the Garden was funded by donations pledged by the local community, thus demonstrating the appreciation of the community for the Garden.

Events

Festivals. The parish church has hosted Flower Festivals and in 2018 replaced it with a **Scarecrow Summer Festival** weekend, during which village members

make and place handmade scarecrows all around the village. The Festival comprises a wide variety of events designed to appeal to the wider community, e.g., a dog show, miniature railway, music groups, an evening concert, talks, bar, food stalls in the Pavilion, teddy bear jumps from the church tower, duck race, a grand draw, and a prize competition. Village members are encouraged to participate in several ways, e.g., host a stall, offer a talk or demonstration, and help decorate the church with flowers. The Festival concludes with a Festival service in the church at the end of the event. The 2018 Festival generated under £5,000 for the church, plus funds for other village organisations of varying amounts. A Winter Festival is currently under consideration.

Activity Groups. Monthly Messy Church; Friday morning activity for children and families before Easter; Good Friday activity morning; Holiday activity club. Parents and Carers Group and Toddler Group are held in the village hall due to incapacity of the Pavilion to accommodate everyone. The groups have been successful in reaching out to people who would not otherwise be in contact with St Mary Linton. The church has an active team of bell-ringers, and occasionally visiting bell ringing groups practise in the church.

Get-togethers for coffee. After service and on other occasions, coffee is served in the church. St Mary Linton is planning to expand coffee serving gatherings and install new coffee making facilities in the church building.



Top: Baby Steps; Cabaret event. Middle: Linton Bell Ringers; Mothers Union picnic. Bottom: Wild church (Photo by Linton church); Children's corner (Photo by Timur Alexandrov).

“People come here for lighting candles and prayer, they appreciate it being quiet. The place is safe enough to leave with candles burning, you couldn’t do that everywhere... There are people who come for tourist reasons, for the history or because it’s a beautiful building in a beautiful part of the village, and we have people who come from overseas to look for traces of their ancestors.”

Revd Dr Margaret Guite
Team rector

Engagement

Family and children committee member: In 2019, St Mary the Virgin Linton re-established the volunteer position, which was on a paid basis in the past, to reach out to families and children in the village.

Collaboration and co-sponsorship of youth work: Together with Linton Free Church, St Mary the Virgin Linton collaborate for school assemblies with the Parish Council and the Beacon Youth Trust Cambridgeshire, a Christian charity in the village that supports young people through weekly activities and promotes a healthy lifestyle. Links have also been established with the Deanery youth group. Assemblies in the Junior School are led by a volunteer from St Mary’s in partnership with the Free Church Minister, who is also on the rota of leaders for the Infants’ School weekly service in St Mary’s. A small group of the Free Church’s congregation also attends the St Mary’s ecumenical service on the Easter Day. Additionally, St Mary’s runs SMYG (St Mary’s Youth Group) for 9-13 years old children.



The Pavilion's exterior and interior.

REFLECTIONS

Challenges

Church Location. Although located in the centre of the village, the church tower is hidden behind village housing and the Pavilion is completely hidden behind the church building. A small road sign indicates the direction towards the church. The lack of visibility means that resources are required to publicise the church's presence, services and activities.

Vandalism. The Community Peace Garden has suffered from vandalism – there have been instances of littering, loud radio, and the use of soft drugs. Rectification of physical and reputational damage requires additional resources.

Community Attachment to Church Fixtures. The remaining 19th century pews in the chancel and on the sides of the building are originally from Michaelhouse in Cambridge. The church may seek a faculty for their replacement by chairs, though possibly retaining some highly carved bookrests which could be used in a re-ordering of the small side-chapel. While removal of the Brass Eagle Lectern at the front of the chancel would increase the flexibility of church space, the PCC has decided to keep it until the planned improvements for the North Aisle have taken place and the line of sight for the choir and others seated in the North Aisle can be assessed. There have been a few vocal opponents to the removal of the lectern.

Lessons Learned

To adapt the church building for more flexible and a wider use.

St Mary the Virgin Linton is planning to relocate or replace the organ, and refurbish the underused space in the chancel and choir vestry under the tower. The red chairs that replaced the pews add colour and aesthetically fit the medieval church interior. The seats for the choir are in the side aisle nearer the congregation but the Eagle Lectern restricts the line of sight of the choir and obstructs their view of the electronic screen, hanging from the chancel arch, on which the service is projected. Extra screens to overcome the visibility problem are under consideration.

To allow sufficient time for new initiatives to be introduced.

Since Grade I listed building restrictions need to be accommodated when any new activity is under consideration, planning horizons need to be sensitive to such requirements. For example, the

PCC is currently considering adapting the church building by creating a separate room that would be quick and easy to heat, and available for community groups and meetings. At present, the use of church space is impeded by artefacts, such as the Brass Eagle Lectern and the Millicent Memorial, that require lengthy negotiations to secure permission to make alterations to the Grade I listed building. *'Things do move very slowly here. As I say, three and a half years to get a noticeboard is pretty extraordinary'*, says Dr Guite.

To foster collaboration links with other churches.

The presence of the Linton Free Church in the village and the membership in the team of parishes creates opportunities for new collaborative projects.

To create a living church.

Although church buildings use is high on Sundays, the PCC supports more use of the church building on weekdays.

"I just have a general feeling of people's frustration. I've recently been given all sorts of bits of paper of past visions, they've had architects come to give advice as to what can, what can't be done over the past ten years. And I think people are frustrated that none of those things have come to fruition for whatever reasons."

Helene Evans
Churchwarden



“I think [the church] could be used for more of the week if something sparked our imagination as to a really practical way in which it could be used. But I think we’d need to know what it had to be versatile for before we started raising a great deal of money to make the alterations. We do seek inspiration from what other churches in the diocese are doing with their buildings.”

Revd Dr Margaret Guite
Team rector

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