

ESCOOMB

GROUP OF CHURCHES



PARISH
PROFILE



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND

DIOCESE OF DURHAM

ESCOMB

GROUP OF CHURCHES

COMPRISING:

ESCOMB CHURCH
ST CUTHBERT'S - ETHERLEY
ST JAMES' - HAMSTERLEY
ST PHILIP & ST JAMES' - WITTON-LE-WEAR

Welcome & overview of the role

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Witton-le-Wear



Escomb



Etherley



Hamsterley



We hope that this Parish Profile gives you a feel for what the Escomb Group is about: who we are, what we do, and how we want to develop our faith and our churches. Of course, this document cannot tell the whole story so we very much hope you will come to visit and meet us. Indeed, we hope and pray that you might even decide that the Escomb Group is to be part of your own vocational journey of faith; one in which your gifts, skills and efforts can complement ours.

Our group is a family of four churches set to the west of Bishop Auckland. We have been in vacancy since November 2019 and we're really looking forward to having a new Priest-in-Charge. We're four churches who work well together, even if we don't visit each other's Churches for services as often as we might like, we know we're far from perfect!!

Through good organisation, and much prayer, we've kept regular services going in all Churches, with the help of retired Priests and good lay leadership. What we're now really looking for is an experienced and reflective Priest-in-Charge who will take time to get to know us well, provide spiritual leadership and be willing to take an active team role in enhancing, inspiring and growing the work that is already being undertaken.

There are solid foundations already in place:

1. Our congregations are resilient and faithful
2. We benefit from a well resourced and active steering group
3. There is good lay support in place for leading and assisting services.
4. There are good ecumenical links, particularly in Hamsterley which is part of an LEP

There are excellent established foundations on which to build and grow, and a number of exciting opportunities. As the new Priest-in-Charge, you will have the chance to work with experienced churchwardens, new and established PCC members, as well as some very experienced parishioners.

We recognise there is potential for significant growth across all ages in each of our churches; well beyond what we are used to. We are looking for someone who will lead us to achieve that – through reaching more widely into our community and through better harnessing & developing the Gifts of the Spirit within all our existing congregations.

OUR DIOCESAN VISION

AN INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP PAUL



At the end of 2019 we gathered representatives from every parish (including the Escomb Group) for The Waymark Conference, to pray, talk, share stories and reflect on how we might best respond to God's call to us to be his Church. We reflected on our learning from our previous vision and priorities. We agreed to maintain our Vision

**'From the Tyne to the Tees and the Dales to the Sea, blessing our communities in Jesus' name
for the transformation of us all'**

Through prayer, conversation and sharing our stories we began to discern maintaining, but sharpening, our three priorities. Through the voice of our children and young people we discerned that we should add a fourth, Caring for God's Creation. This was in response to the question, 'How shall we focus our energies, prayers and resources over the next five years?' Together we sensed this is God's call on us.

The result is our missional strategy which we describe as Renewing Pilgrimage – an opportunity and invitation for each of our parishes to step out in faith together, responding practically to the call to Challenge Poverty, Energise Growth, Care for God's Creation and Engage with Children, Youth and Young Adults.

In making this a reality it will look different in every community. In some places it will come about in collaboration with others. Nobody is expected to do everything immediately or alone, but we are all invited and expected to find ways to respond relevantly.

OUR DIOCESAN VISION



In the Escomb Group this feels particularly relevant. We sense the importance of Energising Growth – in discipleship and in the number of people served by and engaging in the life of our churches. We also sense the importance of Challenging Poverty, Engaging with Children and Young People and Caring for God's Creation in areas with lots of families, with some significant pockets of poverty, and with deeply rooted communities that still look to, and are open to, the local church.

In praying for a new Priest for these Parishes we are looking for someone excited by and wanting to be part of this vision. The Waymark Prayer sums up this hope -

Loving God, guiding the people of Durham Diocese faithfully through the years:

We thank you for saints who have marked our path,
young and old, known and unknown, from all places and in all walks of life.

Help us to find your way in our generation:
transformed by your truth, sharing your life, blessing our communities.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen

We look forward to meeting together and sharing in this with you.

In Christ,

+Paul

Bishop of Durham

The Bishops' walk from Hamsterley via Witton le Wear to Escomb with fellow pilgrims in May 2022





OUR CHURCHES

Escomb

ESCOMB

Escomb Church is the Church of England parish church located in the village of Escomb, County Durham, England. It is one of the oldest Anglo-Saxon churches in England and is considered a rare architectural gem. Due to its history Escomb is a popular visitor attraction where the congregation and visitors alike can experience the rich history and spiritual atmosphere of this ancient Anglo-Saxon church



Etherley

ETHERLEY

Etherley is a vibrant Church with activities appealing to a wide range of ages and with the current congregation meeting weekly for Holy Communion. During the vacancy Priests with permission to officiate have led Festival and Life Event services and biblical reflections throughout the church calendar. It's a hub for a range of community activities with children and families during school holidays and runs a thriving monthly lay-led Messy Church. There are 33 people on the electoral roll with an average Sunday attendance of 22. The church has seen growth during the vacancy and membership has increased by 7 over the last year.



Hamsterley

HAMSTERLEY

St. James' is an ancient 12th & 13th century Church situated half a mile outside the village. It operates as part of an Local Ecumenical Partnership in conjunction with the Methodist chapel and, to a lesser extent, the historic Baptist chapel. Relationships are friendly and supportive. Hamsterley has a "travelling" congregation with worship alternating weekly between St James and the Methodist Chapel.



Witton-le-Wear

WITTON-LE-WEAR

With a mission statement of 'Wear Connecting', it will come as no surprise that the River Wear runs through the parish. A church has stood here since the 11th Century, right at the heart of the village.

Witton has a strong team ethic with various groups addressing the life of the church and where the majority of the congregation are in at least 1 team, all dealing with all aspects of church life. These include the readers, intercessors, service stewards for weddings and funerals with craft leaders for children's mission, to name but a few. We try to be involved in Diocesan mission innovations where possible – Talking Jesus Mission and Waymark. There are 39 on the Electoral Roll at present with a congregation of around 17 – 26. Our pattern of worship seeks to be inclusive with Cafe Church and Early Birds All Age Worship whilst maintaining two Holy Communion services a month.



Escomb Lake

The Escomb Group of Parishes is situated in the South West of the Diocese of Durham in the unitary authority of Durham County Council.

The group of churches covers an area of approximately 53 miles sq and has a population of circa 6400. It is predominantly a rural area with a high dependency on agriculture and farming as the main source of employment. There is a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty nearby.



Witton-le-Wear

There are very good commuter links to Darlington, Durham, Newcastle and Teesside. There are also East Coast Main line railway stations in Darlington and Durham and international airports at Newcastle and Durham Tees Valley.

The Saxon Church in the parish of Escomb & Witton Park is of great national and international historic interest and attracts a considerable number of tourists and visitors.



Hamsterley Forest

We are close to Bishop Auckland where The Auckland Project is currently developing Auckland Castle and the surrounding area.

There are 160 people on the Electoral Rolls of the four Churches. The Revised Common Lectionary is used and Common Worship Books are available for baptisms, weddings and funerals.



The River Wear at Witton Park



Wear Valley

As the name suggests this area is located in the valley created by the River Wear, from its source near the Cumbrian border to the point where it leaves the boundary of County Durham. It is a district of contrasts, with almost half of its 195 square miles falling within the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is a mixture of both rural and urban, with the majority of the population living in the more urban eastern part of the district, which includes the market towns of Bishop Auckland and Crook.

The historic City of Durham, with (probably) the best Cathedral in England is within half an hour's driving time. Bishop Auckland is currently undergoing transformative development led by the Auckland Project and also benefits from Kynren - the UK's "must see" spectacular outdoor live action show.

Weardale



OUR MISSION

SCHOOLS & YOUTH

All 4 Parishes access secondary education using Wolsingham School and College Campus, St John's School, and Bishop Barrington both in Bishop Auckland, with Parkside in Willington. Parents who opt to educate their children privately are well serviced in both Durham and Barnard Castle.

Sixth form education is offered in several schools including King James in Bishop Auckland and Queen Elizabeth sixth form college in Darlington.

Bishop Auckland College provides further education and there are universities within travelling distance in Newcastle, Durham, Sunderland and Teesside.

All Churches in the group have associations with their local Primary Schools. Etherley hosts teachers and pupils for school visits and nursery children visit to sing at their Lunch Club once a month, they have a Parent and Toddler group providing weekly contact with 15 families during term time and have provided a monthly Messy Church for over 9 years, supported by volunteers from other parishes in the group. Since Spring 2022 they have partnered with Durham County Council's "Fun and Food" initiative to match fund weekly children's activities and trips for 60 participants in school holidays.



WORSHIP

ESCOMB

Escomb currently holds one Holy Communion service a week at 11am on Sundays. In addition, the Lay Reader and a Methodist Reader run an informal service in the Celtic tradition one Sunday a month at 4pm. This used to draw people from across the county but the numbers dropped sharply due to Covid and are only slowly building again. A quiet meditation service is held fortnightly on a Wednesday evening. Escomb benefits from having a Lay reader, who is a member of the Community of St Aiden and St Hilda and has undergone Cursillo training. A member of the congregation is licensed by the bishop to preach 6 times a year and there are nine people on the bible reading rota. Escomb villagers are proud of their church and we hold several weddings and baptisms each year.

ETHERLEY

At St Cuthbert's, Holy Communion is the principal Sunday service celebrated in accordance with the Church of England's Common Worship, Order 1. The Liturgy of all services is shown in large print on audio-visual screens through the church's Wi-Fi which also enables the showing of videos and hymns licensed by CCLI. This facility also enlivens Messy Church worship. Festival services, home communion and Life Events are currently led by Priests with Permission to Officiate as and when required.

HAMSTERLEY

Through membership of the Hamsterley Local Ecumenical Partnership, services alternate between St James and the Methodist Chapel. On the second and fourth Sundays the joint 10.30am service is held in St. James'. This has always been a Communion Service. Services take place in the Methodist Chapel on the first and third Sunday of the month are generally lay led with Communion taking place every month of so. St James is fortunate to have an Organist who lives in the Parish and also benefits from having an Authorised Lay Minister who is now following the LLM pathway.

WITTON-LE-WEAR

Witton has a varied pattern of worship; the 1st and 3rd Sundays are Holy Communion, the 2nd Sunday is Cafe Church and the 4th Sunday is Early Birds All Age Family Worship. All these are devised, and delivered by the Laity.

Witton also hold a Celtic themed service called Sanctuary @ Six through Advent, Lent and during the summer. Sunday Holy Communion Services twice monthly are led by Priests with Permission to Officiate during the period of vacancy.

FOUR CHURCH - GROUP SERVICES

Where there is a fifth Sunday in the month, there is normally a group service of Holy Communion which rotates around the four Churches. Group services can also take place on certain key occasions such as Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday and special festival services. Group Services are not always as well attended as they could be and it is true to say that it is sometimes a struggle to get our parishioners to travel

WIDER ENGAGEMENT

ESCOMB

Because of the limited nature of the building's facilities it's difficult to provide community space within the Church. Escomb's biggest opportunity is to provide the warmest of welcome to the many visitors and pilgrims who come from far afield and overseas – up to 10,000 a year. In 2022 visitors came from over 23 different countries. There is a team of 8 guides (4 of whom come from outside the worshipping community), these guides give tours and talks interpreting the building and its Christian heritage for visitors. Escomb participates in the National Heritage Open Day scheme in September each year. Escomb is on one of the Northern Saints' Trails – The Way of Life – and has, as a consequence of this, experienced a growth in the number of pilgrims visiting. Several local schools bring children each year relating to the RE and History curriculum and there are information sheets for schools to enhance the experience of their visit.

ETHERLEY

St Cuthbert's supports the Children's Society through its very popular Christingle service, and has raised money for Christian Aid, Disaster Emergency Fund and the Royal British Legion. The church toilet is "twinning" with a latrine in Nepal. St Cuthbert's supports its local Food Bank on a weekly basis, and donated knitted toys, games and selection boxes during Advent.

The Coffee Morning knitting group is currently making blankets for the residents of the village nursing home and selling hats and gloves for a charity. A Friday Lunch Club is open to anyone and offers fun food and friendship to an average of over 30 people. This is funded by voluntary donations and run by a dedicated team of volunteers. A free seaside trip last Summer was enjoyed by those who attend the Lunch Club.

Durham Cathedral



HAMSTERLEY

Most activities and events are driven through the LEP for example : Monthly Tea and Tattle in the Cross Keys, concerts and recitals in St James' Church, Monthly Discovery Group, Pancake café and the production of Parish Magazine, the circulation of which extends well beyond those directly involved in the Church.

The Friends of St James has now been officially formed and the Trustees' efforts will focus on fundraising, hopefully attracting support from people not usually seen attending church services. The launch event which took place in May 2022 was themed around the 500 year old Hamsterley Paten, the oldest piece of plate in Durham Cathedral, and a full weekend of community activities and events took place.

WITTON LE WEAR

Witton is committed to supporting DEC appeals and supporting the local Food Bank - for example Harvest Supper & Quiz monies were donated. The Church is also committed to Aid to Burkina Faso which is a local charity, but due to the army coup cannot continue with their life changing projects at the present time.

The Churchwarden visits the school each month to deliver an assembly and classes happily come down to church for specific KS1 and 2 topics, like Baptism, The Place of Worship etc and the school uses the church for its Harvest Festival. During Covid "Lent pebbles" project took place (ash + glue painted crosses on white marble stone) which were all left outside church for people to take away.

Hamsterley Paten 500th Anniversary with the Dean of Durham and the Lord Lieutenant



BUILDINGS FOR MISSION

ESCOMB SAXON CHURCH was built around 675 AD, is a Grade I listed, ancient monument and one of the oldest churches in the country. It is built in the Celtic style with a simple, limewashed nave and chancel and seats up to 50 people. There is no vestry, parish office, kitchen, WC or church hall. We are a small, aging congregation, very welcoming to the thousands of visitors we have each year and passionate about our church. The nearby church at Witton Park was closed in 2019 and Escomb and Witton Park are now one parish. A Quinquennial Inspection took place in 2022 and although there are several maintenance jobs to do there is no immediate major work required.

St Cuthbert's ETHERLEY is a warm, welcoming Grade II listed church built in 1832 and refurbished in 2017 to provide a versatile worship and community space accommodating up to 200 people. The church has a modern kitchen, servery and an easy access toilet with baby changing facilities. The church is committed to engaging with community outreach and mission. The building has been adapted to support wheelchair access. Mobile pews can be configured to support traditional and contemporary worship and a range of community and mission activities. We are developing a wildlife area within the churchyard. The village war memorial and some commonwealth war graves are located in the churchyard.

St. James' Church, HAMSTERLEY is a 12th Century Grade I listed building, situated about half a mile outside the village. It is in good condition, has electricity and heating but at the moment no permanent toilet facilities. The layout is traditional, with fixed pews, but the PCC is pursuing a lay lead re-ordering project, making the space available more flexible to allow more concerts, recitals and talks to take place.

St Philip & St James' in WITTON-LE-WEAR is a Grade II listed building standing high above the village green but with a multipurpose path linking the upper part of the village with the lower part. The church benefits from being able to heat the space in around 35 minutes due to new boiler and new radiators. Our church underwent a reorganisation in 2016 with the addition of a kitchenette and toilet. The pews at the back of church in front of the font were removed and put around the walls in what became known as the Social Space which is a wonderful place for all sorts of activities.

River Wear



LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE

There is a Joint Steering Group with membership comprising the Churchwardens from each of the parishes. The group meets monthly and its purpose is to review progress and the operational management and strategic direction of the Group of Parishes.

The group works well together and is enthusiastic about our prospects for the future.

We work and pray together as a team in a positive and constructive way and are keen to lay foundations for future growth. Having been in vacancy for over three years we are excited and enthusiastic for the arrival of a new Priest in Charge to work and pray alongside us. Each Parish still has its own PCC but there is a committed belief that working together closely, pooling our skills and talents and sharing responsibilities is a key way forward.

GIVING, FINANCE & GENEROSITY

Generous donations are made via BACS transfers, standing orders, plate collections and other donations. Not all Churches are able to pay their Parish Share in full but are committed to attempting to do so. Generous donations are made by individual Churches to local charities.

Kynren at Bishop Auckland



CREATION CARE OFFICER

Introduction

This post includes a 0.33 FTE commitment to actively supporting and promoting the fourth of our Diocesan Priorities, Caring for God's Creation (CFGC). This will involve engaging especially with parishes and schools throughout the diocese, enabling them to deepen their understanding of care for creation as part of holistic Christian mission, and encouraging them to take practical steps cherish the environment and minimise their footprint on it.

The Diocese has recently appointed its first Diocesan Environmental Officer (Bethan Still). A significant part of the DEO's role is the development of a costed decarbonisation plan. In 2022 the Diocesan Synod embraced the General Synod's commitment (GS 2258) for the Church of England to reach Net Zero in our carbon footprint by 2030, and a Net Zero working group has now been established. This is a complex project and will occupy a substantial amount of the DEO's time. There is therefore a real need for further capacity, particularly in enabling churches and schools to develop their environmental understanding and practice.

Main Duties

The Creation Care Officer (CCO) is a supporting role working closely with the Diocesan Environmental Officer and engaging more broadly with key staff from other teams including but not limited to the Diocesan Board of Education, the Property Team, Buildings Advisors, Finance as well as other churches and parishes within the Diocese. The specifics of the CCO's work will need to be agreed clearly with and undertaken under the direction of the DEO, in support of the overall task that the DEO has been appointed to fulfil and the wider objectives of the Church of England Net Zero Action plan.

While the Net Zero Group is already active, in the coming months we will also be exploring the establishment of a wider a CFGC working group. Key members of this group will be the DEO, the diocesan Environmental Champion, the Archdeacon of Auckland (Ven Rick Simpson – Bishop's Leadership Team lead on CFGC) and the CCO. This group will be an important reference point for the CCO.

The main areas of work for the CCO will include:

- Support and enable diocesan leadership and leaders of churches and church schools in promoting the 'Caring for God's Creation' diocesan priority through development of the volunteer network of Environment Champions
- enabling parishes and schools to develop their understanding of environmental issues, rooted in a Christian theology of creation and holistic mission;
- enabling parishes and schools to develop appropriate positive practical actions to care for God's creation;
- Encourage the registration of local churches for the Eco Church scheme. Support local churches in their engagement with Eco Church scheme, providing support and guidance.
- the encouragement of parishes to identify and appoint Environmental Champions, and enabling the ECs to network and support one another.
- the identification of (and, where necessary, the development of) good environmental resources for worship and prayer in churches and schools.
- the identification of (and, where necessary, the development of) good environmental resources for church study groups.
- encouragement of biodiversity in churchyards, e.g., by engaging with Caring For God's Acre.

We are therefore seeking for this post a minister who understands caring for God's creation as an element of and integral to Christian mission and has a real commitment to helping the church learn and grow in this area. Technical knowledge of environmental issues and previous experience of Christian environmental teaching and action, while desirable, will be less important than a commitment to and passion for this work, and a willingness to learn and help others learn how to better "strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth" (the Fifth Anglican Mark of Mission).

