

# BENEFICE PROFILE



**PARISHES OF BLACKWELL AND CONISCLIFFE**



**BENEFICE PROFILE  
FOR THE PARISHES OF  
BLACKWELL, ALL SAINTS' AND SALUTATION  
IN PLURALITY WITH  
THE PARISH OF CONISCLIFFE  
ST. EDWIN'S, HIGH CONISCLIFFE  
AND  
ST. MARY'S, PIERCEBRIDGE**

---

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

|  |    |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP SARAH.....          | 04 |
| WELCOME.....                                 | 06 |
| OUR VISION.....                              | 08 |
| OUR WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES.....              | 09 |
| MISSION.....                                 | 16 |
| ADDITIONAL ROLES AND SUPPORT.....            | 20 |
| WORKING TOGETHER AS A BENEFICE.....          | 22 |
| OUR DIOCESE AND IT'S PRIORITIES.....         | 23 |
| WORKING TOWARDS THE DIOCESAN PRIORITIES..... | 24 |
| GOVERNANCE.....                              | 29 |
| COMMUNICATION.....                           | 31 |
| OUR PARISHES.....                            | 32 |
| OUR DEANERY.....                             | 36 |
| ECUMENICAL LINKS.....                        | 36 |
| FINANCE.....                                 | 37 |
| BUILDINGS.....                               | 41 |
| THE VICARAGE.....                            | 49 |
| OUR LOCALITY.....                            | 50 |

## APPENDICES

LINKS TO THESE DOCUMENTS BELOW CAN BE FOUND ON THE WEBSITE: [HTTP://WWW.ALLSAINTSBLACKWELL.ORG.UK/](http://www.allsaintsblackwell.org.uk/)

- A BLACKWELL VISION
- B CONISCLIFFE PCC MISSION AND VISION WORKSHOP
- C CHURCH URBAN FUND ANALYSIS 2025
- D PATTERN OF WORSHIP THROUGHOUT THE CHURCH SEASONS
- E BLACKWELL ANNUAL REPORT 2024 - 25
- F CONISCLIFFE ANNUAL REPORT 2024
- G DEANERY STRUCTURE
- H BLACKWELL ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2024
- I ALL SAINTS' MILLENNIUM TRUST (DARLINGTON) LTD. ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2024
- J CONISCLIFFE ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2024



# AN INTRODUCTION FROM BISHOP SARAH

---

This is an exciting time to be exploring joining the Diocesan family in Durham Diocese. We are on the cusp of a fresh chapter in our mission and ministry together. We are currently discerning with the National Church who will be the next Bishop of Durham, called to lead as we seek to make real our vision for the transformation we so desire across our Diocese. We are deeply encouraged by the award this year of significant national funding, demonstrating real confidence in our vision.

Our strategy for transformation and missional growth ('Called to Fruitfulness') is an opportunity and invitation for each of our parishes to step out in faith together, responding practically to our priorities to **Challenge Poverty, Energise Growth, Care for God's Creation and Engage with Children, Youth and Young Adults**. 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.

In this benefice, in the west of Darlington, 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 believe our churches can grow in number if the right opportunities to explore faith are created. We also sense the importance of Challenging Poverty, especially across the poorer areas of Darlington, where the church is already engaged



in responding to these needs. It is vital for us to open a new chapter in Engaging with Children and Young People, as our Sunday congregation now has few families with children attending regularly; how will we change this? We are already developing our work Caring for God's Creation with our Silver EcoChurch award and seek encouragement to build on this.



In praying for our new Priest, we are looking for someone excited by and wanting to be part of this vision and new future.

**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,

**+Sarah**  
**Bishop of Jarrow**  
**Acting Bishop of Durham**





# WELCOME

---

## WELCOME TO OUR BENEFICE PROFILE

We hope this profile offers a helpful insight into our Christian mission by introducing you to the life and character of our two parishes and their churches. Whilst each parish has its own individual characteristics, both have a commitment to the growth of the Church, their own growth as disciples and to service of their community. We are seeking an inspiring and dedicated incumbent to lead, support and reinvigorate our two welcoming communities, one predominantly urban and the other more rural.

## DISCERNING GOD'S CALL

Together, we are seeking an experienced and empathetic incumbent with visionary missional leadership qualities to guide the ministry team serving both parishes. We are looking for someone who brings a deep spiritual heart, a collaborative approach and proven experience in leading change to support growth in mission and discipleship. You will need to be confident in working across different traditions and styles of worship, and gifted in supervising and supporting licensed lay ministers (readers), non-stipendiary ministers and retired clergy. Given the breadth of work in the benefice, it is important that you are financially and administratively competent as well as being good at managing your time.





## BLACKWELL

The parish of Blackwell hopes to find a leader who will help us identify and focus on our core mission, make best use of our church and hall resources and work with us to develop a clear, strategic approach to mission and growth. As a PCC we are committed to moving forward together in unity, openness and with reflection. We seek a leader who will walk with us on this journey, helping us to shape a new chapter for the future.

## CONISCLIFFE

In Coniscliffe parish we are looking for someone who can nurture the existing congregation while helping us explore new forms of worship and deeper community engagement. A key priority at St Edwin's is to rebuild relationships with the local church school and to develop family-focused mission through Children's Church and family services. At St Mary's it will be important to work with the local village community to develop a sustainable and fruitful festival church.

In both parishes the PCCs are committed to:

- Identifying core mission and missional priorities in light of current resources.
- Developing strategic approaches to growth, with clear goals and regular reviews.
- Working closely with the incumbent to shape and realise a shared vision for the future.

We hope the following pages will support your prayerful consideration of this role. If you feel God may be calling you to lead us we would be delighted to welcome you for an informal visit. This is a role with real potential to make a lasting impact in two vibrant and hopeful parish communities. Could you be the person to help us write our next chapter for the coming generation?



# OUR VISION

---

We are the united benefice of the two parishes in the west end of Darlington

## **For Blackwell –**

“Seeking to Grow God’s Kingdom by: Growing the Church; Growing as Disciples; and Growing in service to the parish and beyond.”

## **For Coniscliffe –**

“To be a blessing in our community and to keep the Christian story alive.”



(The Blackwell Vision is set out in detail in Appendix A on the website.)

(The Coniscliffe Vision is supported by the notes of the February 2025 workshop set out in Appendix B on the website.)



# OUR WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

---



## BLACKWELL

There are 107 people on the church electoral roll (2025 Full Revision) with over 50% residing within the parish boundary and approximately 90% living inside the DL3 postal district. Worship in our church can be described as “middle of the road”, using Common Worship, although a number of the congregation are open to more informal and contemporary styles of worship. The tradition is currently one of vesture on Sunday mornings with cassock, surplice and stole or cassock alb. A cope is traditionally worn at patronal festivals and feast days, for example Easter, Pentecost and Christmas.

Worship is supported by a number of retired priests who have permission to officiate and four experienced licensed lay ministers. There is additional lay participation in many aspects of the services of worship.

The focus of worship is Eucharistic. Regular Sunday worship comprises 8.30am Holy Communion (Said) and 10.30am Parish Communion (Sung); both from Common Worship. Uniformed organisations are invited to a non-Eucharistic 10.30am service four times a year and there are occasional all age family services. There is a Sunday evening

service at 6.30pm which can be said or sung BCP or Iona, Taizé, healing or a Songs of Praise theme. Morning prayer is said most Monday mornings at 9.30am. There is a well-attended Holy Communion (Said) service at 10.00am on Wednesdays, most of this congregation also attend Sunday services. A variety of services occur across the year in response to the church seasons and are detailed in the table in Appendix D on the website.

**Attendance at Services**

|                       | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|
| Christmas             | 283  | 131  | 87   |
| Easter                | 112  | 94   | 81   |
| Average Week, October | 74   | 92   | 76   |
| Usual Sunday          | 51   | 60   | 71   |
| Worshipping Community | 160  | 70   | 86   |



The number of occasional offices continues to decline and is significantly lower than ten years ago. The small number of baptisms is probably a reflection of the current limited children’s church offering by the parish. Funerals in church continue to reduce in line with the national picture. During the vacancy and the period of ill health absence of the previous incumbent our retired clergy have focused on the church funerals.

Starting in 2019, and during the pandemic, the parish undertook Partnership for Missional Church (PMC). The outcome of this process was to initiate a form of Café Church every two months on Sunday afternoon with the aim of allowing people to discover a fresh way of being church and to experience more contemporary worship. It was supported by a small group of musicians. Although these services are currently on hold, they represent an opportunity to reach a new range of people in the future.

**Occasional Offices**

|           | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------|------|------|------|
| Baptisms  | 10   | 16   | 6    |
| Marriages | 1    | 0    | 1    |
| Funerals  | 37   | 22   | 11   |



Music plays an important part in worship. We currently use Hymns: Ancient and Modern and Mission Praise in congregational worship. This is supported by a Director of Music, and a small choir enhanced for special occasions by singers from other local choirs. The choir is non-auditioning, with the ethos that we accept anyone who wishes to help us in our role. Opportunities to work with other choirs to enrich the life of the choir and music in the church are actively sought. The Director of Music is responsible for choosing and preparing music for services, in collaboration with the incumbent. For major festivals the choir perform anthems from a diverse range of sources rather than exclusively from the traditional Anglican repertoire. This is part of a deliberate effort to make the music accessible and relevant to both the choir and congregation and to encourage participation by both.

There is limited participation in prayer groups and Bible study. A monthly Saturday prayer hour is attended by four or five regulars. Lent Groups are offered each year but participation has declined since the pandemic. A small group meets each week for Bible study via Zoom. There is a long-standing Reading Group which meets fortnightly at the home of congregation members. This group becomes one of the Lent groups during that season. The schedule for study is as follows:

- Autumn term - a book from the Bible.
- Spring term - a Christian book and the Lent Course.
- Summer term - a biography or historical book.



**All Saints' Christmas Choir**



**Play and Praise Service**

There has been no regular children's church since the pandemic and prior to that the numbers participating had declined significantly. The absence of a children's church is something that the congregation regrets very keenly.

The PCC took over the running of the All Saints' Blackwell Pre-School over 15 years ago. It is rated "Outstanding" by Ofsted and offers places for children from the age of two-years to school age. It runs in the Millennium Centre from 8:30am to 2:45pm, five days a week during term time (38 weeks a year). Each day there are approximately 30 children in attendance.

We have recently re-established the Friday morning parent and toddler group. Now called 'Tiny Tots Playgroup', it is led by one of the licensed lay ministers and several volunteers. There is a Play and Praise Service for this group each half term and termly for the pre-school. We are hoping to start a regular toddlers service on a Friday morning at 9.30am.

Christingle services held on Christmas Eve are always popular and attract young and old from across the parish. During Holy Week in 2025, for the first time in a number of years, we hosted a morning of Easter activities and worship for children and families. We hope to build on the positive feedback this generated in the future.

With an ageing congregation and a parish profile that indicates a high proportion of older people, the need for pastoral care continues to grow. The small pastoral care team, currently led by one of our retired priests, undertakes regular pastoral visits in the home, care homes and hospitals together with bereavement visits.

Service summaries are produced for those who do not own computers or do not have a way to connect to online services. They are distributed by volunteers, each Monday, to those who are unable to access church services. They include the readings from the previous Sunday's services, together with the sermon.

The Blackwell Annual Report is included as Appendix E on the website for more detailed information.







## CONISCLIFFE

In 2024 there were 69 people on the Electoral roll with around 20 new applications since the APCM in 2025, mainly from Piercebridge residents and families from Children's church. St Mary's church was granted status as a Festival Church in 2019 by the Bishop of Durham, with the direction that it should be available for occasional offices and the celebration of Christmas, Easter and Harvest plus "such other services as from time to time appear appropriate to the Incumbent and PCC in order to serve the community". A faculty for internal works has been granted to make the building multi use, including kitchen and an accessible toilet, energy efficient heating and lighting and flexible seating to serve the community and parish. It has been closed for renovations over the past year but previously had good attendance at festival services including Christmas, Easter and Remembrance Sunday. Going forward there is a real opportunity to develop a pattern of worship, including new expressions of church, which reflects the needs of the local community and complements the pattern of worship in the benefice.

St Edwin's Church offers a weekly Sunday service at 10.30am. This long-established monthly pattern of worship, as set out in the table below, also includes family services around main festivals including Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Mothering Sunday. On Good Friday and around Harvest St Edwin's hosts a joint service across the benefice; an "Hour before the Cross" and "Evensong in the Country". The local C of E school also holds services in St Edwin's church, often inviting the neighbouring pre-school to attend.

## Pattern of Services

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| First Sunday  | Holy Communion – Book of Common Prayer |
| Second Sunday | Service of the Word – Common Worship   |
| Third Sunday  | Holy Communion – Common Worship        |
| Fourth Sunday | Holy Communion – Common Worship        |
| Fifth Sunday  | Holy Communion – Common Worship        |

The style and tradition of worship can probably be described as a "middle of the road" approach, utilising Common Worship and the Book of Common Prayer. There is an emerging interest in, and support of, more informal and contemporary styles of worship. However, there remains a faithful core of people treasuring more traditional approaches including BCP services. Within worship music is almost exclusively traditional hymns to organ accompaniment (we have three regular organists) but there is also some movement towards a wider variety of music which has inspired church members to explore interest in a community choir and church group. There is minimal engagement in Bible study or prayer groups outside Sunday worship, although church members are invited to join in these activities at Blackwell. Pastoral Support is offered informally by members of the congregation in the Parish, calling on support from the ministry team as needed.



**Messy Church at St Edwin's**

For the past few years, we have also offered a Children's Church using a Messy Church format. This is led by the Associate Minister and there is a core of five or six families who attend. This is held during term time in the months where there is no Family Service. Most of the children actively participate in reading or leading prayers or songs within family services. A number of children from this group were confirmed in 2023.

The relationship between the local churches and C of E school in High Coniscliffe is ripe for development. There is a strong desire within the parish for the closer relationship between the churches and the school and pre-school, building on the recent growth in children's and family ministry. One PCC member recently joined the Board of Governors. We hope that the new incumbent will also serve as a school governor.

### Attendance at Services

|                       | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------------------|------|------|
| Christmas             | 125  | 129  |
| Easter                | 104  | 51   |
| Average Week, October | 28   | 25   |
| Usual Sunday          | 19   | 20   |
| Worshipping Community | 41   | 43   |

The number of occasional offices has remained reasonably steady over the past few years but is lower than ten years ago, reflecting the national picture.

### Occasional Offices

|           | 2023 | 2024 |
|-----------|------|------|
| Baptisms  | 6    | 1    |
| Marriages | 2    | 3    |
| Funerals  | 4    | 3    |

Overall, across the churches, there is a stable and slowly growing worshipping community, many of whom live outside the parish.

The Coniscliffe Annual Report is included as Appendix F on the website for more detailed information.





# MISSION

---

## BLACKWELL

Despite the challenges of recent years, we believe that we should continue to engage with the Mission Action Plan (MAP) priorities of the Church which include:

- Discipleship and spiritual growth.
- Community connection/outreach.
- Ministry to young people.
- Pastoral care.
- Communication.

The Vision Day in September 2023 highlighted a need to develop further discipleship opportunities. We already offer zoom Bible studies, Lent courses, Wednesday afternoon Reading Group and a prayer group. However, they have had limited uptake in recent years. Encouragement and support are needed to seek out new inspiring resources that would engage a wider audience both within the congregation and the wider community.

The Community Outreach Group was re-established at the beginning of the last PCC year. The group has re-visited the development of the 'Warm Spaces' initiative and the weekly craft group are the first church group to embrace this outreach to the community. The Community Outreach Group are currently developing a new 'Parish Welcome Pack' and working towards offering 'Dementia-Friendly' church.





We are a church that enjoys spending time with each other in fellowship. Many of the social activities are co-ordinated by the Social Committee. We now offer opportunities for the local community and congregation to meet over coffee on the first Saturday of each month (either Coffee & Chat or Parish Coffee Mornings). The long-established parish lunches are held monthly. These are an important means of limiting social isolation. Over the past year we have also enjoyed a Burns Supper, a Passover meal, a Harvest Ceilidh, quizzes, concerts and welcomed a local touring theatre group. Together with our Summer Garden Party and Christmas Fayre these events offer opportunities to engage with the parish and wider communities.

We currently have two Guide units, two Brownie packs, Rainbows and a Scout unit (cubs and scouts) meeting in our church halls. Our uniformed organisations and their families continue to be invited to Parade services throughout the year, including Mothering Sunday and Remembrance Day, although attendance by children and families is limited. Engagement, particularly with the brownies and guides, has improved during the current vacancy and the Social Committee recently supported a successful fundraising coffee morning for one of our brownie packs. There are opportunities to develop this engagement further.



In summary, there are many existing and potential opportunities to engage in mission and growth in the parish of Blackwell with the right encouragement, leadership and resources. These include:

- a PCC and congregation with a wide range of gifts, skills and experience.
- PCC members willing to engage positively about change and growth.
- Well utilised church facilities offering a platform for engagement and growth.
- New local housing developments and in-migration to the parish.
- Newly appointed parish administrator with an exceptional skill set.

## CONISCLIFFE

Whilst mission has not, historically, had an explicit focus for the PCC, it is implicit within our discussion around outreach in the wider community and engagement with families. St Edwin's church has a regular programme of concerts, coffee mornings, bargain sales and the ever popular "Beer and Carols" evening. St Mary's has a community keen to engage with fundraising and community events once the building is open for use.

In the 2023 APCM, the associate minister, in the absence of the incumbent, asked for the discovery of a "renewed sense of direction and development... confident in the goodness and grace of God who inspires our way and guides our path". It is fair to say that the vacancy audit process<sup>[1]</sup> and subsequent Vision Mornings have shifted the PCC's focus to engage with mission more overtly.

The vacancy audit process highlighted that, "it was unclear how much PCC members owned vision and purpose, although most felt they supported it!" Reflecting on the vacancy audit process, both churches would benefit from support to connect their enthusiasm for community outreach with a deeper understanding of mission. This should offer a firmer foundation from which the churches can grow.

There are many existing and potential opportunities, with the right leadership and resources, to engage in mission and growth in the parish.



Indeed, since the vacancy audit process was completed, the PCC has met to discuss mission and vision. It is planning further, regular focus days. The outcome of the Vision Morning is set out in Appendix B on the website.

The vacancy audit process highlighted the following missional opportunities, strengths and needs:

- Committed and dedicated, though small, PCC.
- Good understanding of being rooted in their local (largely rural) community.
- Readiness to re-engage with the local C of E primary school and Pre-School.
- PCC members are willing to engage positively about change and growth.
- Leadership from Associate Minister in this area.
- Reordered church in Piercebridge.
- Housing developments in Coniscliffe.
- Recent moves in the deanery to share skills and experience, especially from “Resourcing Churches”.
- Joined up working through the parish administrator (parish office) to support follow-up contact from occasional offices.



**St Edwin's Church**



**St Mary's Church**



# ADDITIONAL ROLES AND SUPPORT

---

Our Vicar will be central to the work of the churches and in supporting everyone in the three congregations to play their part in delivering our visions. We feel it is essential that mission is seen as integral to our everyday lives as Christians that includes, but goes beyond, the direct work of the parish church.

Our vicar will have the support of the Ministry Team. It presently includes:

- A minister in secular employment (Director of Care at local hospice), licensed to the Benefice, lives locally and has served the Coniscliffe community for over ten years.
- Three retired and experienced clergy who have the bishop's permission to officiate and minister across the benefice.
- Four licensed lay ministers who work across the benefice (one licensed lay minister is Emeritus and one is the Blackwell Director of Music).

Our vicar has also, historically, fulfilled the following roles:

- Chair of All Saints' Pre-School Executive Committee.
- Chair of the All Saints' Millennium Trust (Darlington) Limited.
- School Governor – High Coniscliffe C of E Primary.
- President of the Ladies Fellowship.
- Links to other local organisations.



**High Coniscliffe C of E Primary**



**All Saints' Preschool**





**St Edwin's Church Hall**



**Millennium Hall**

Lay participation makes a significant contribution to the life of both parishes. Each parish church has two churchwardens with Blackwell also having two deputy wardens. The laity play their part in welcoming, delivering the readings, making our intercessions, serving at communion, offering the chalice and pastoral visiting.

Administrative support is provided via the Parish Office situated in the Millennium Centre. The recently appointed parish administrator works 10 hours per week on a flexible basis. Our administrator is employed by Blackwell PCC on behalf of both parishes and works to support all three churches across the benefice. Blackwell also employs a music director (also a licensed lay minister) and five staff who run the Millennium Centre based PCC Pre-School.

This wider team supports both the mission of the churches and the work of the vicar. We hope that our new incumbent will lead us in the effective management of these resources.

# WORKING TOGETHER AS A BENEFICE

---

The parishes in the Benefice are actively working to find more opportunities to collaborate. Examples include:

- The ministry team works with the incumbent and church wardens to plan and co-ordinate worship across the benefice.
- Occasional offices were historically coordinated by the incumbent or associate minister and shared between the ministry team, but we are currently moving towards a whole benefice approach to co-ordinate all occasional offices through the parish administrator based in Blackwell.
- The safeguarding officers support one another across the benefice with Blackwell's Safeguarding Officer overseeing DBS checks on behalf of the three churches.
- Lent groups and learning opportunities are offered across the benefice.
- All Saints' choir leads choral evensong at St Edwin's (historically twice a year) and Coniscliffe participate in the All Saints' Advent Service of Light.
- Events, social and fundraising activities for each parish are promoted across the benefice and members of the congregations attend each other's events. Some events, for example the Burns Supper, are collaborative events.
- Administrative functions are centralised in the Parish Office at Blackwell.



# OUR DIOCESE AND ITS PRIORITIES

---



The Diocese of Durham was founded in 635. It covers a geographical area of 2,530 square kilometres in the North East of England, broadly between the River Tees in the south, the River Tyne in the north, the Pennines in the west and the North Sea in the east. The churches within the diocese serve a population of nearly 1.5 million people. It has 234 licensed clergy and 49 licensed lay ministers within its 209 parishes. There are three Archdeaconries, Auckland, Durham and Sunderland divided into a total of 13 Deaneries. The Diocese has an overseas link with Lesotho.

The See of Durham is currently in vacancy following the retirement of the Right Reverend Paul Butler in February 2024. †Sarah Jarrow is Acting Bishop of Durham.

The Diocese has four priorities:

**CHALLENGING POVERTY**

**ENERGISING GROWTH**

**CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION**

**ENGAGING WITH CHILDREN, YOUTH AND 18-25S**



**St Edwin's Church**



**Entrance to Millennium Centre**



# WORKING TOWARDS THE DIOCESAN PRIORITIES

BLACKWELL

## Challenging Poverty:

We support charities both financially and with our time. The congregation make weekly collections for the local Foodbank. Support for Christian Aid, the Children's Society, USPG and the Darlington Town Mission are a regular feature of church life. The church also has links with Christian Solidarity Worldwide and Compassion Programme (several parishioners sponsor children in Burkina Faso). Fundraising events are held for other charities by the church and associated groups (e.g. Ladies Fellowship).

A failed attempt to set up a warm space within the church/hall has been reviewed by the Community Outreach Committee and relaunched with the support of the church craft group. Individual members of the congregation are actively engaged in the local community in a variety of voluntary and employed roles, including trustees of charities (Sir ED Walker Almshouses Trust), membership of voluntary organisations e.g. Rotary Club, Darlington Lions, Soroptimists, St Teresa's Hospice and Darlington Town Mission.

## Energising Growth:

Current attendance figures with around 50 adults and occasionally one or two children present show a significant drop compared to 2019. At that time attendance was approximately 140 adults and 30 children, as it had been since 2014.



Discussions about mission during the vacancy audit process generated many well thought out ideas, including:

- redeveloping links with local schools, families and uniformed groups.
- working with the elderly including those in the local care homes.
- following up on baptisms, weddings and funerals.

However, the parish needs leadership to make these ideas a reality.

Although a small number of the congregation are involved in Bible study or reading groups, the vacancy audit process, as well as earlier vision days, highlighted a need to develop and grow the spirituality of the parish. In addition to the ecclesial tradition of the majority of worship there are those within the congregation and, potentially, in the wider community, who are keen to see a more prayerful, Jesus-focused ministry. Guidance and leadership are needed to facilitate growth through spiritual development and a thoughtful introduction to a more diverse range of worship.

We have offered the 'Bereavement Journey' course to support those who have experienced bereavement, both recently and in the past. This is an initiative started under the previous incumbent and is now led by a member of the congregation. Publicity about the course with local GP practices and funeral directors continues to bring new people to the course from across the town and further afield.

A rolling programme of social and community events e.g. parish lunches, coffee mornings, fayres, quizzes and concerts offer fellowship and community engagement beyond the congregation and parish.



**Christmas Fayre**



**Coffee Mornings**

## **Caring for God's Creation:**

In 2021 the Green Action Group (a PCC committee) obtained the Eco-Church Silver Award for the church and Millennium Centre, including the development of a community orchard. Members of the group have shared their experiences and best practice across the Deanery. There is some interest in moving towards Gold Award. The group is currently participating in the Diocesan Net Zero Action initiative and regularly includes environmental articles in the parish magazine.

## **Engaging with Children, Youth and 18-25s:**

A number of activities are hosted within the church premises involving children. These include the Tiny Tots playgroup, the PCC Ofsted registered Pre-school, Blackwell community band and choir, uniformed organisations, choirs and private children's parties. Family and parade services are held several times a year, but there is limited attendance by families and uniformed groups. The vacancy audit highlighted that these have limited outreach from the church. However they are areas that the congregation would be keen to develop.

Pre-pandemic, 'Open the Book' was offered to local schools by a team drawn from the congregation and several years ago, whilst the children's church was active, the church had a children's/youth worker shared with a local school. It was hoped that Café Church would be a way of engaging with children and youth but it had limited impact. The audit also highlighted our lack of awareness of more recent initiatives for families, children and young people used by other churches such as Messy Church. Thoughtful leadership will help the congregation to develop and implement a strategy for our outreach to children, young people and their families.



**All Saints' Church**



**Millennium Centre and Vicarage**





## CONISCLIFFE

### **Challenging Poverty:**

St Mary's Church has had established links over recent years with a charity working in Ukraine setting up a mobile kitchen. Collections are regularly made for local foodbanks e.g., at Harvest and for the Children's Society at Christmas. Through the Associate Minister's links with the local hospice, St Teresa's, fundraising and other events for the hospice feature within the life of the church. As a PCC the question of Challenging Poverty does not receive the attention it might and further discussion at PCC would be useful. Within the Deanery there is a Christians Against Poverty service. Some members of the church and community have links with "Darlington Connect", an organisation combatting poverty in the town.

### **Energising Growth:**

Members of the parish are encouraged to attend activities such as homegroups and confirmation preparation at All Saints' Church but there are limited resources within the church to support initiatives for those exploring faith. However, in the recent vision statement the PCC were keen to see how programmes such as Alpha could be utilised in the parish and have reached out to other churches in the deanery for support with this.

## **Caring for God's Creation:**

The parish has a large carbon footprint and has been asked by the Diocese to produce a plan for reducing it. One of the main causes of this is that the Church Hall is used throughout the year by the pre-school. We have installed more energy efficient heating and are exploring controlling this through broadband connection. Also, St Edwin's Church has an oil boiler which takes up to two days to heat up in winter. The PCC recognises the need to replace the heating system. We have taken the opportunity to install more energy efficient low carbon heating at St Mary's as part of the refurbishment project. The graveyard and cemetery provide a habitat for wildlife which could be improved in the future.

## **Engaging with Children, Youth and 18-25s:**

The monthly Children's Church is a real sign of life, with local families participating thus creating a second congregation. There is the potential to develop this further. Children play an active part in a number of family services throughout the year, usually linked to church festivals. Links with High Coniscliffe C of E school are beginning to be re-established and the children visit the church for Christmas Services. This is an area ripe for development. The children of St Edwin's pre-school also attend church for special occasions. The leader is keen to strengthen links. Occasional family focused film events are also held. "Beer and Carols" in the local public house is very well attended by young adults and families in the parish.



# GOVERNANCE

---

## SAFEGUARDING

There are designated Parish Safeguarding Officers serving the benefice. At Blackwell the role is mainly carried out by one of the churchwardens, who also acts as the designated DBS Administrator for the benefice. At Coniscliffe, this role is currently undertaken by the Associate Minister who, as a registered social worker, brings professional expertise to the position. The two officers work with their respective PCCs to ensure a consistent and robust approach to safeguarding across both parishes.

Safeguarding is a standing item on PCC agendas in both parishes and the National Safeguarding Dashboard is actively used to promote best practice. The benefice was an early adopter of the dashboard, which continues to guide and support ongoing improvement in safeguarding processes and culture.



## BLACKWELL

The parish has a committed team with a full complement of two churchwardens, twelve elected lay PCC members, three deanery synod representatives and all the licensed lay ministers have taken up the option of being on the PCC. Most PCC members, understandably given the nature of the community, have had or still have professional, managerial or executive roles at work or in the local community. We have a congregation which is committed to the proper stewardship of both the church and the Millennium Centre, with numerous individuals taking on specific roles on a





voluntary basis. Increasingly, there is a sense of the burden resting on a decreasing number of the faithful. The church has a strong focus on fellowship through social activities and is considered hospitable. The PCC has operated for many years on a system of sub-committees that report to the PCC. In recent years newer committees/groups have been introduced to address areas of need (Communication) or a particular focus (Green Action). The PCC generally works in a collaborative and supportive manner. With several active committees feeding into its work, chairing meetings can be complex at times, but this is balanced by a shared commitment to working together constructively. The vacancy audit process

highlighted a need for PCC development and training to help it understand its responsibilities and shift the focus of meetings from secular business to mission and discipleship.

There is a Health and Safety Policy in place that has been agreed by the Millennium Centre trustees and the PCC of All Saints' church. A competent person has been appointed who carries out Risk Assessments and follows up on any safety incidents.

## CONISCLIFFE

The parish has a small but committed team with a full complement of four churchwardens across the two parish churches, three elected PCC members and a treasurer, though the burden of most things seems to fall on a few. Two members of the PCC are also deanery synod representatives. The PCC has fallen into the habit of "keeping the show on the road" with a disproportionate focus on buildings. As noted in the Vision Document, the PCC would benefit from additional training and resources to help it better understand its legal responsibilities and improve its missiological function.



# COMMUNICATION

---

## BLACKWELL

We continue to strive to improve our communications. This was an area highlighted for further work by the 2023 All Saints Parish Vision Day. The development of a Communication Group has enabled co-ordination of our communication activity within and beyond the parish. A range of communication methods are in use, detailed below. In addition, leaflet drops about the Summer and Christmas Fayres, together with the parish Christmas card, are delivered to all households in the parish. Additional individuals have been trained to support further development and updating of the Church website. Church notice boards have been renewed to increase the visibility of activities and services within church buildings.

The Church has:

- a Website at <http://www.allsaintsblackwell.org.uk/>.
- a Facebook page at [All Saints' Church, Blackwell, Darlington | Facebook](#).
- a TV screen in the church foyer also promotes services, activities in the church and hall and forthcoming events.
- the Weekly Herald which is emailed using MailChimp to the congregation and beyond every Friday morning and includes the pew sheet for the following Sunday, notices, and recent news.
- a Zoom link for the 10.30am Sunday service, distributed by Mailchimp, together with the order of service and readings. It is also used to distribute updates and notices promoting events and Zoom links to occasional offices where requested.
- a Parish Magazine; one hundred and thirty copies of the parish magazine (11 issues /year) are produced and distributed in the local area.

## CONISCLIFFE

The church has:

- a Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/SaintEdwins> proving particularly effective for advertising community events such as “Beer and Carols” and other social activities.
- a bi-monthly parish newsletter is delivered to every house in the parish.
- a St Edwin’s web domain which is under development.

# OUR PARISHES

---

## BLACKWELL

The parish of Blackwell, All Saints' and Salutation was created in November 1998 with the merger of two daughter churches from established parishes in the town. Built in the 1930s, both were wooden framed mission halls with later church halls added. The church building at Salutation could no longer obtain public insurance and had to be demolished although the hall remains in current use. With similar problems at All Saints, the church was replaced in 2008 with a steel framed brick and slate building financed by donations from, and fundraising by, members of the congregation. A decade earlier the church hall at All Saints was replaced with what is now the Millennium Centre financed by fundraising and a substantial grant from the Millennium Commission.

The parish has a population of 7,357. It has an IMD ranking of 10,487 out of 12,178 in terms of deprivation and, therefore, is among the least deprived in the Diocese and the country.

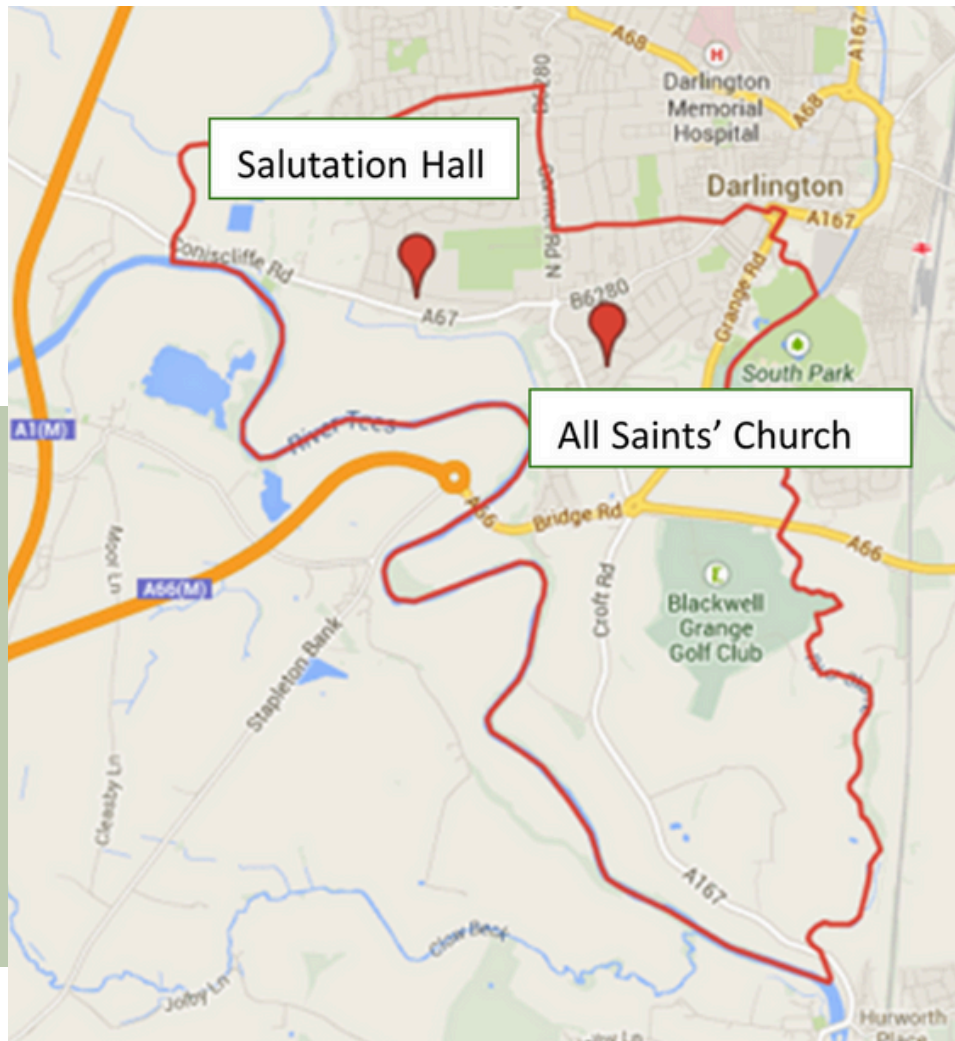
The parish has in excess of 3,200 households, 83% of which are owner-occupied, the remainder being largely privately rented. It has one of the highest proportions of older-aged people (31%), though there are many families and younger couples in the community. The proportion of the population from ethnic minorities is relatively low. Unemployment is also relatively low and a significant proportion of the population commutes to work outside the town. The Church Urban Fund (CUF) analysis for the parish is set out in Appendix C on the website.





Within the parish there are:

- All Saints' PCC operated Pre-School.
- First Ferndene Nursery.
- Flora House Nursery.
- Hummersknott Academy - 11-16 Secondary School.
- Carmel College – 11-18 Roman Catholic Secondary School.
- Polam Hall School – an all-age independent Free School Kids.
- Three corner shops (one Post Office).
- Sporting Clubs for Tennis, Rugby, Golf and Football.
- Elm Ridge Methodist Church.
- Darlington West Cemetery and Crematorium.
- Blackwell Grange and Bannatyne's Hotels.
- Sir E D Walker Almshouses Trust.
- Care Homes at the Gardens, Abbeyfield and Dalkeith House.
- Carmel Road GP Surgery.



**Parish of Blackwell, All Saints' and Salutation**

## CONISCLIFFE

Coniscliffe is a rural parish of 6.5 square miles on the outskirts of Darlington with a number of farms situated within its boundaries. It incorporates four villages to the west of Darlington: Low Coniscliffe, Merrybent, High Coniscliffe and Piercebridge. There are two parish churches:

- St Edwin's, High Coniscliffe - Grade II\* listed building.
- St Mary's, Piercebridge - Grade II listed building.

There are no other churches or places of worship in the parish.

Within the parish there are a number of local businesses, including pubs and farm shops, a C of E school and a private pre-school based in the church hall.

The proportion of poverty, social housing and ethnic diversity is relatively low, indeed one of the lowest in the Diocese of Durham. The population is around 1,100, 18% of whom are older people (2021 census). The overall level of deprivation is classified as "average" (Church Urban Fund) in comparison to parishes in the country. There are currently 445 households in the parish with construction underway of a significant new housing development of 1,500 houses and a new school. It has an IMD ranking of 6,571 out of 12,178 in terms of deprivation and therefore, is of average deprivation in the Diocese and the country. The Church Urban Fund (CUF) analysis for the parish is set out in Appendix C on the website.





### Parish of Coniscliffe

The parish is rich in history. As you travel west from Darlington you find the villages of Low Coniscliffe and Merrybent before arriving at High Coniscliffe. High Coniscliffe, recorded in documents dating back to 778 AD, stands on the edge of a long, steep ridge of limestone rock about half a mile from the River Tees, hence the “cliffe” part of the village's name. The first half of the name probably comes from the Old Norse for 'King'- suggesting that the village name means 'King's Cliff'. St Edwin's church stands proudly on the top of the cliff overlooking the river and valley below. The dedication to Edwin is unusual and of interest because Edwin was a King of Northumbria (AD 586-633) canonised as a saint and the ‘overking’ of all the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. He was particularly important for introducing Christianity to Northumbria. Although St Edwin's church is of the 12th or 13th century, several pieces of Anglo-Saxon stone sculptures of the 10th and 11th century have been built into the walls, making it likely that there was an earlier church on this site.

A mile further west, the village of Piercebridge is situated at the point where the old Roman road called Dere Street crossed the River Tees. This road ran north from the Roman military headquarters at York well up into the valley of the Tweed in the present Scottish Borders. The village and church lie on the site of a Roman Fort (AD260-270) and have been continuously inhabited since the Romans settled here. The Church of St Mary was built in 1873 by Cory and Ferguson, in the Early English style.



# OUR DEANERY

---

The parishes within the benefice are part of the Darlington Deanery. The Area Dean has recently announced his retirement and we anticipate the appointment of his successor shortly. The Deanery is composed of two groups, Northern and Southern, which are described in Appendix G on the website. This is the structure published in the Deanery Plan developed in 2019 which is currently undergoing revision. Both parishes have representatives on Deanery Synod; one representative is the Deanery Treasurer and another chairs the Deanery Poverty Action Group.

The churches across the Deanery are currently working with the Diocesan Mission, Discipleship & Ministry Team and the Growth Team to pilot a new initiative focused on Maturity, Mission and Multiplication.

## ECUMENICAL LINKS

---

The primary ecumenical link for Blackwell is with Elm Ridge Methodist Church, but more could and should be done together. Historically, at the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the Methodist minister comes to preach at the 8.30am service at All Saints' Church and, the following Sunday, someone from Blackwell (clergy or licensed lay minister) preaches at Elm Ridge's evening service. This arrangement has largely ceased since the pandemic. Methodist Church members do come to our services at All Saints' but not many Blackwell people go to the Elm Ridge services.

All Saints' and Elm Ridge choirs join together on Advent Sunday evening for the Service of Light. This service is well supported by all church members. Congregation members also take part in a "Walk of Witness" between Elm Ridge Methodist Church and All Saints' Church on Good Friday.

Churches Together in Darlington is an informal body whose aims are to initiate, encourage and develop co-operation and understanding between the Christian Churches in Darlington and to enable the Christian Churches to bear a more effective witness in the community and to serve it more effectively.

# FINANCE

---

## BLACKWELL

The PCC established a Finance Committee which supports the treasurer and consists of five professional people plus the incumbent. This committee helps provide financial decisions for the PCC. It closely monitors costs and any expenditure in excess of £200 must have the formal approval of the committee before going ahead. Management accounts are prepared by the treasurer for every PCC meeting having been discussed by the Finance Committee in detail before being presented to the PCC. The Committee also reviews the annual budget.

The church is in the Parish Giving Scheme and receives approximately 75% of its planned giving donations through this route. We have a Planned Giving Treasurer who is a member of the Finance Committee and looks after other giving by parishioners not in the Parish Giving Scheme, claiming the Gift Aid on these donations. We have a very active Social Committee which organises many events throughout the year to generate income and support outreach.

Our parish share payment to the Diocese is of particular importance to us. Whilst the amount we have given has reduced over the past five years, we are still committed to paying out as much of our planned giving receipts as possible in order to support mutuality. We have pledged £50,000 in parish share for 2025.



The table below shows the main sources of Income and Expenditure for the last three years:

| <b>Income</b>            | <b>2024</b>    | <b>2023</b>    | <b>2022</b>    |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                          | £              | £              | £              |
| Planned Giving           | 45,649         | 54,159         | 57,584         |
| Tax Reclaimed            | 12,634         | 13,807         | 16,340         |
| Loose Plate              | 6,817          | 5,627          | 12,204         |
| Donations and Legacies   | 10,805         | 680            | 1,257          |
| Pre-School Income        | 102,177        | 48,257         | 55,466         |
| Fees received            | 5,727          | 6,395          | 12,397         |
| Fundraising              | 23,936         | 19,130         | 15,545         |
| Salutation Hall lettings | 3,598          | 4,189          | 3,926          |
| Other Income             | 3,092          | 2,483          | 3,686          |
|                          |                |                |                |
| <b>Total Income</b>      | <b>214,435</b> | <b>154,727</b> | <b>178,405</b> |

| <b>Expenditure</b>       | <b>2024</b>    | <b>2023</b>    | <b>2022</b>    |
|--------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                          | £              | £              | £              |
| Parish Share             | 50,000         | 60,000         | 70,000         |
| Church Running Costs     | 15,244         | 10,776         | 13,424         |
| Salaries, Fees Payable   | 14,758         | 15,119         | 19,002         |
| Pre-School Costs         | 94,180         | 52,881         | 54,458         |
| Salutation Hall Expenses | 3,913          | 3,118          | 1,998          |
| Cost of Services         | 3,111          | 3,267          | 3,181          |
| Fundraising Expenditure  | 13,247         | 9,748          | 8,241          |
| Church Maintenance       | 2,215          | 807            | 1,379          |
| Other Costs              | 15,334         | 12,704         | 11,939         |
|                          |                |                |                |
| <b>Total Costs</b>       | <b>212,002</b> | <b>168,420</b> | <b>183,622</b> |

|                                  |               |                  |                 |
|----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Overall Surplus/(Deficit)</b> | <b>£2,433</b> | <b>£(13,693)</b> | <b>£(5,217)</b> |
|----------------------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|

| <b>Reserves</b> | <b>2024</b>    | <b>2023</b>    | <b>2022</b>    |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
|                 | £              | £              | £              |
| Unrestricted    | 60,714         | 72,804         | 82,278         |
| Restricted      | 68,739         | 54,216         | 58,435         |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>129,453</b> | <b>127,020</b> | <b>140,713</b> |

The Millennium Centre, which is attached to the church, is run by a separate trust as required by the Millennium Commission who provided much of the finance for its construction. The hall generates rental income of approximately £20,000 per annum and normally shows a small surplus for the year. It is a great asset to the church and is used daily for much of the year, including by the All Saints' Blackwell Pre-School from Monday to Friday in term time. The Annual Report and Accounts for Blackwell PCC are set out in Appendix H and for the All Saints' Millennium Trust (Darlington) Ltd in Appendix I on the website.



The table below shows the main sources of income for the last three years:

|                      | 2024          | 2023          | 2022          |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
|                      | £             | £             | £             |
| Loose Plate          | 2,488         | 4,079         | 3,673         |
| Planned Giving       | 7,724         | 7,839         | 7,368         |
| Gift Aid Tax claims  | 3,220         | 2,872         | 1,626         |
| Donations            | 3,345         | 3,098         | 2,030         |
| Fundraising          | 3,474         | 3,099         | 3,548         |
| Letting income       | 10,317        | 7,974         | 6,403         |
|                      |               |               |               |
| <b>Total Income*</b> | <b>35,411</b> | <b>35,945</b> | <b>30,620</b> |

\*This does not include investment interest payments and donations for the St Mary's project.

The majority of the letting income derives from St Edwin's Pre-School. In addition to their use of the Church Hall, it is used regularly by the local W.I. and Parish Councils. St Mary's has also been used by the Parish Council. The limited availability of St Mary's Church has restricted income, it is anticipated that the reopening will increase income from planned giving and community use, as well as providing the parish with another venue for fundraising.

The PCC have decided that they will launch a stewardship campaign in the Autumn of 2025.

|                                  | 2024           | 2023         | 2022         |
|----------------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                  | £              | £            | £            |
| <b>Overall (Deficit)/Surplus</b> | <b>(1,807)</b> | <b>2,550</b> | <b>3,789</b> |

The budget is tight and balances each year before any capital expenditure. The 2024 outturn went into deficit as a result of the cost of installing new heating in the church hall (Cost £5,000). This should, however, reduce running costs in future years.

Our contribution to the diocese changes depending upon anticipated expenditure. For example, in 2024 the Quinquennial inspections in both churches took place, along with an inspection of trees, and remedial work. Knowing this was due we reduced our parish share.

We have pledged £11,000 in parish share for 2025. The parish share paid in the previous three years is:

| 2024  | 2023   | 2022  |
|-------|--------|-------|
| £     | £      | £     |
| 8,337 | 12,000 | 6,000 |

Our total reserves amounted to £121,653 and is broken down as follows:

|  |         |
|--|---------|
| Current Account (Unreserved)                             | £15,651 |
| Current Account (reserved for St Mary’s Project)         | £11,000 |
| Deposit Account  | £38     |
| CCLA Investment Funds (Designated for St Mary’s project) | £72,797 |
| CCLA Investment Funds (Not Designated)                   | £21,502 |
| CCLA Investment Funds Reserved                           | £665    |

Taking out the funds identified to fund the work at St Mary’s, we ended 2024 with reserves of £37,856. More needs to be done to increase income. We are also very reliant on the income from the pre-school.

The Annual Report and Accounts for Coniscliffe PCC are set out in Appendix J on the website.



# BUILDINGS

---

## BENEFICE

Across the benefice we have the stewardship of six buildings of varying ages and condition. There are always maintenance tasks to deliver and occasionally more significant projects. At the moment St. Mary's Church is being converted into a multi-purpose sacred and community resource. We don't expect our new incumbent to lead building projects, but rather to help us shape how our buildings support the delivery of our mission.

## BLACKWELL

### All Saints' Church

All Saints' Church is joined to the Millennium Centre by a common foyer and entrance. The entrance to the church is through etched glass doors that incorporate a design inspired by verses in Revelation. The church building is accessible for wheelchair users. The buildings are situated in extensive grounds which provide car parking space, and a large, grassed area used for a variety of purposes including the annual Garden Party. The vicarage adjoins the site.

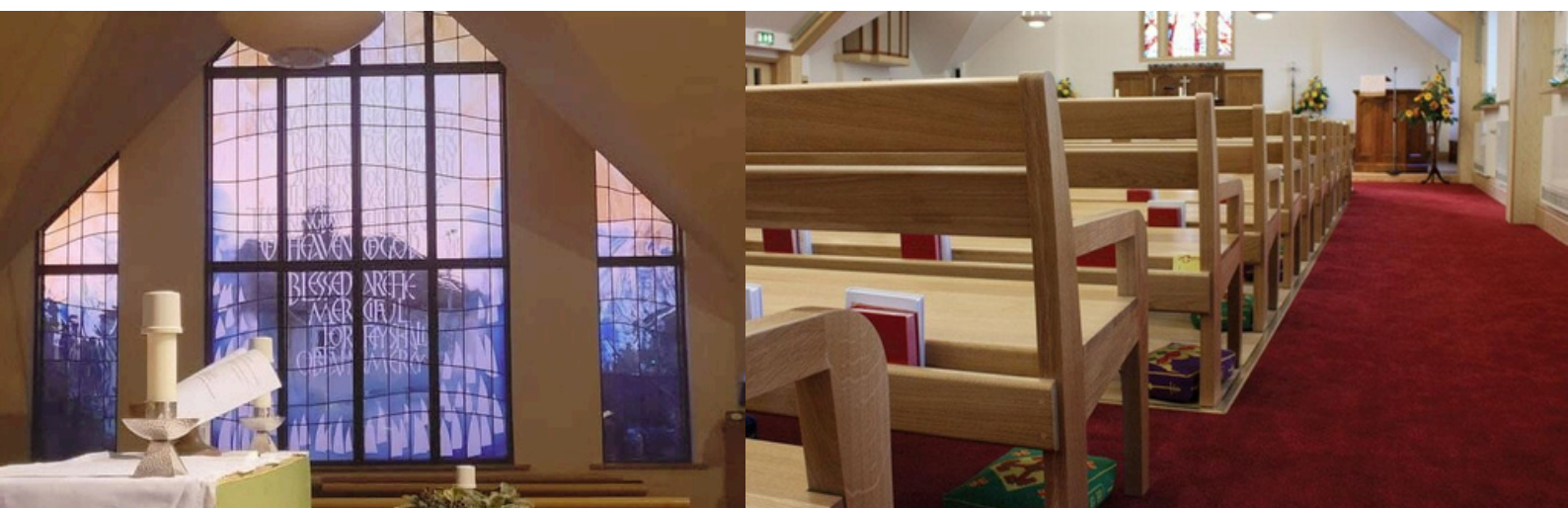
The present church was completed in December 2008 and was consecrated by the Right Reverend Tom Wright, Bishop of Durham, on the 25 April 2009. It replaced the 'temporary' timber-framed church that was built in 1937 to serve as a centre of worship until a 'permanent' church could be built.





Although modern in design and construction, the new church retains a number of features and fittings from its predecessors. Externally the roof features a small spired cupola which replicates the bell cote on the original church. Much of the chancel furniture has been retained from the old church, including the altar, reredos, lectern, pulpit and the communion rail which is, in part, derived from the former Salutation Church.

Of the eight stained glass windows in the church, the four in the nave are of traditional Christian illustrations featuring Mary, St Cuthbert, St George and St Dunstan, whereas the altar, Sanctuary and Baptistry windows are of modern design. The large Sanctuary window is on the theme of the 'Beatitudes'. The Baptistry window is a contemporary interpretation on the theme of baptism and the most recent window, commissioned in 2018 is on the theme of remembrance.



Seating is provided on oak bench pews which are moveable and increase the flexibility of the seating arrangements for services and other events. For example, the church and seating has been arranged 'chapel style' for the Advent Service of Light. In addition to worship, the church has been used for a range of church and community organised performances including music concerts and theatrical productions.

There is a small children's area at the back of the church.

The 10.30am Sunday service, some funerals and other occasional services are live-streamed using a wall mounted camera.

To the side of the chancel is a choir vestry, with a good resource of music books, a clergy vestry with its own WC, and a small servery area enabling the church to be used for services and events independently of the attached hall.

The last quinquennial (church and the Millennium Centre) took place in 2022. It reported that 'The buildings are well maintained and generally in good condition.'



**Interior All Saints' Church**

### **Salutation Hall**

Salutation Hall was built in 1960 as an addition to the Salutation Church. The hall was then extended and modernised in 2001 for use as a community facility following demolition of the church. It is now used regularly by a variety of church and community groups including Brownies, Guides, Circle Dancing, pilates, yoga and fitness classes. The hall is one mile away from All Saints' Church.

Some improvements have been made in recent years, but the PCC is conscious that the facilities in this hall need updating. We have just received a grant of £15,000 to replace the windows. We want to work with our new incumbent to develop a clear vision as to how this hall serves the mission of the church in this part of the parish.





## **All Saints' Millennium Centre**

In 1997 the original church hall was replaced by the Millennium Centre with financial support from the Millennium Commission and significant fundraising by members of the congregation.

The Centre is used continuously throughout the day by children's groups ranging from the church pre-school to uniformed organisations, as well as adult activities, including a range of exercise and fellowship groups. At the weekend the centre is available for social events and children's parties.



The centre is run as a charitable trust, All Saints Millennium Trust (Darlington) Limited, with a board of trustees drawn from the congregation. The Vicar is normally the Chair of Trustees. It operates in close collaboration with the PCC of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Blackwell, All Saints' and Salutation.



The aims of the Trust are:

- To advance the mission of the Christian Church as understood from time to time by the Church of England.
- To advance education for all ages and persons.
- To provide facilities in the interest of social welfare for recreation and leisure time occupation.

The Centre comprises a large hall (150m<sup>2</sup>), three meeting rooms, a kitchen, accessible toilets and extensive storage. The church and the hall share a common lobby area, and a large TV screen displays information about forthcoming events. The parish office is also located in the centre at the top of a flight of stairs. The administrator for the benefice is based here, and there is room in the office for small meetings or several people to work.

A Building and Grounds Committee, which reports to the PCC, leads on the maintenance of the fabric of the church, grounds and hall.

There are significant opportunities to develop the missional use of the church and both halls, with a desire for the church buildings to be central to the local community. However, this will require visionary missional leadership.



**All Saints' Preschool**



**Enid Smith Rooms, Millennium Centre**

# CONISCLIFFE

## **St Edwin's Church**

Apart from PCC meetings, occasional fundraising events or hire as a polling station, the church's main use is one hour per week for Sunday worship. Major fundraising took place approximately 14 years ago when some reordering was done to re-site the organ and font, add a small servery and to open up the rear of the church for refreshments and with a children's area. These serve the worshipping community well. Although there are no toilet facilities in church there are some in the nearby church hall. However, the hall is often in use by the pre-school, precluding their use by those attending funerals and weddings.



The PCC has long been considering how to install toilets in the church and upgrade the heating. Support from a new incumbent would be welcomed to move these projects forward. The latest quinquennial, completed in April 2024, concluded that the church and churchyard are well maintained and are generally in good condition, though concern was expressed about the limited life of the oil-fired boiler. It recommended that the PCC starts to investigate a more economical and sustainable heating system. The PCC remains keen to maintain and improve the building whilst retaining its historic features.

## **St Edwin's Church Hall**

The hall is situated about 50 metres to the side of the church, adjacent to the churchyard. Access is via paths leading from the church or from the main road in the village.

While it is maintained and funded by the PCC, its main use is by “St Edwin's Pre-School”, a small and well regarded, independently run nursery with provision for two- to four-year-olds including wrap-around care for the local area. The PCC has expended significant funds in upgrading the heating to ensure this provision meets Ofsted standards and that the children are kept warm and safe. Some work remains to be done to improve the toilets in the hall. As is the case with such groups, a considerable amount of toys and equipment is needed. The provider cannot easily move this should the hall be needed for a church function or mission opportunity. Additionally, there is no parking close to the hall and, should someone with accessibility needs use the hall, this could prove difficult. The PCC would like to explore if a long-term lease for the hall is viable (e.g., an Albermarle Scheme), meaning that the church could then focus on including accessible toilet facilities in St Edwin's Church and also use the improved St Mary's Church for social and missional events.

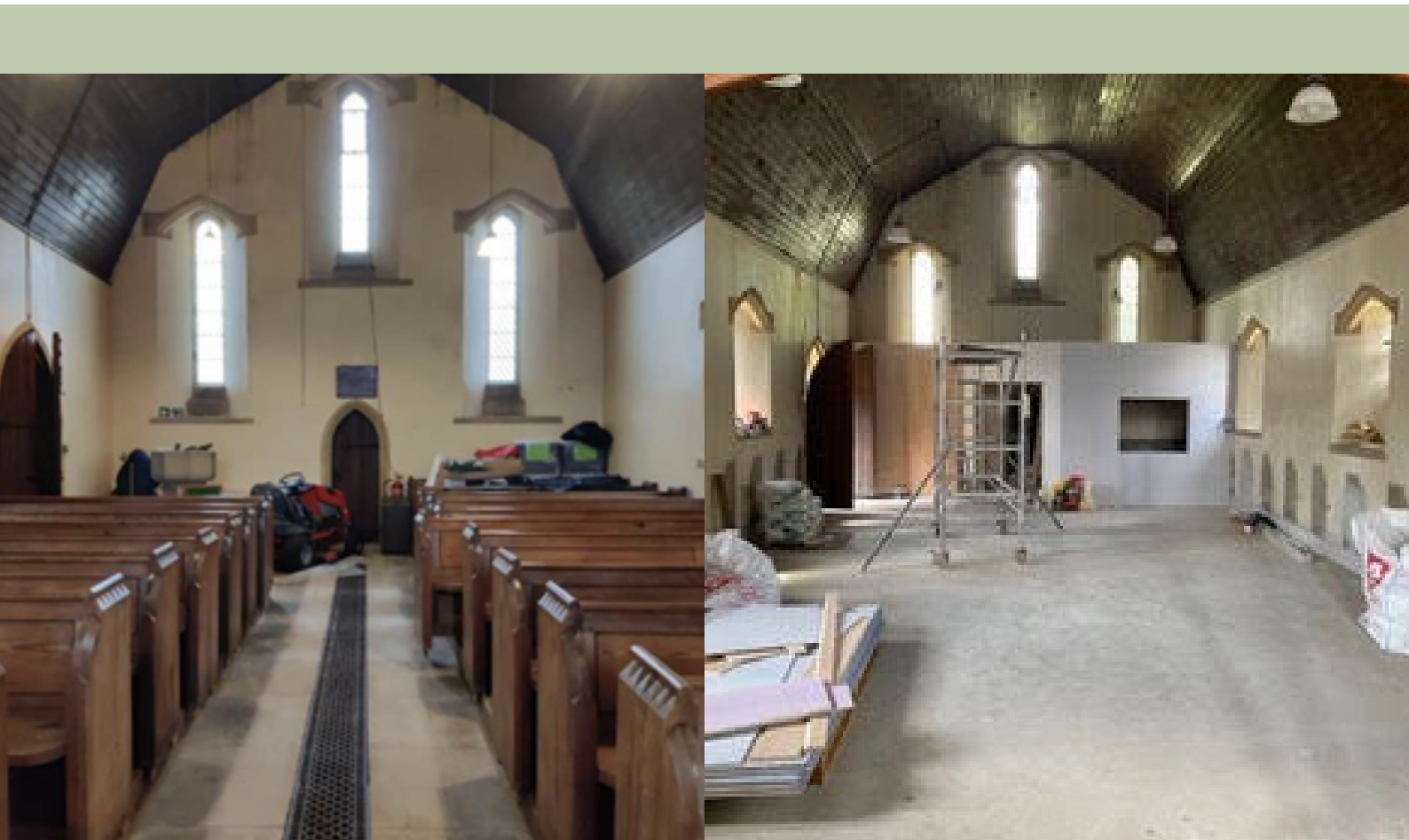




## **St. Mary's Church, Piercebridge**

St Mary's refurbishment is going to plan and should be completed by the end of 2025. A Quinquennial Inspection took place in February 2024, just before the pews etc were removed. The inspection summary was that the church was in good condition, with nothing major needing urgent attention.

There is a vision, supported by the PCC, that when the refurbishment is completed, St Mary's can be used across the parish as a flexible, usable, accessible space for social and missiological events. The vacancy audit process highlighted that this would benefit from "careful handling and planning, with PCC discussion taking place to ensure that there is a clear vision and sound business plan for St Mary's continued use". This includes "missional use". It was also noted that the small community at Piercebridge are looking forward to 'their' place of worship being re-opened, with the main Christian festivals celebrated there as well as social and fundraising events for the whole parish.



**St Mary's Church, before and during renovations**

# THE VICARAGE

---

The vicarage was built in 1997 and is situated in the grounds of All Saints' Church. It is a four-bedroomed (one en-suite) detached property with a study, lounge, dining room, kitchen/breakfast room and utility room with direct access into a double garage. There is a medium-sized garden to the front with parking for several cars and a large enclosed rear garden. The study and downstairs toilet can be isolated by a locking door to prevent access to the rest of the property.



All Saint's Church can be accessed across the church field via a gate from the rear garden. The vicarage is just over three and a half miles from St Edwin's Church and five miles from St Mary's Church. It is within easy walking distance of the town centre and many other local amenities. Abbey Primary School and Polam School are each less than half a mile away with Hummersknott Academy, Carmel RC Academy and the Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College being just over a mile away. There is good access to the A1 (M) and roads to Teesside. The train station, on the mainline from London to Edinburgh, is just over a mile away.

# OUR LOCALITY

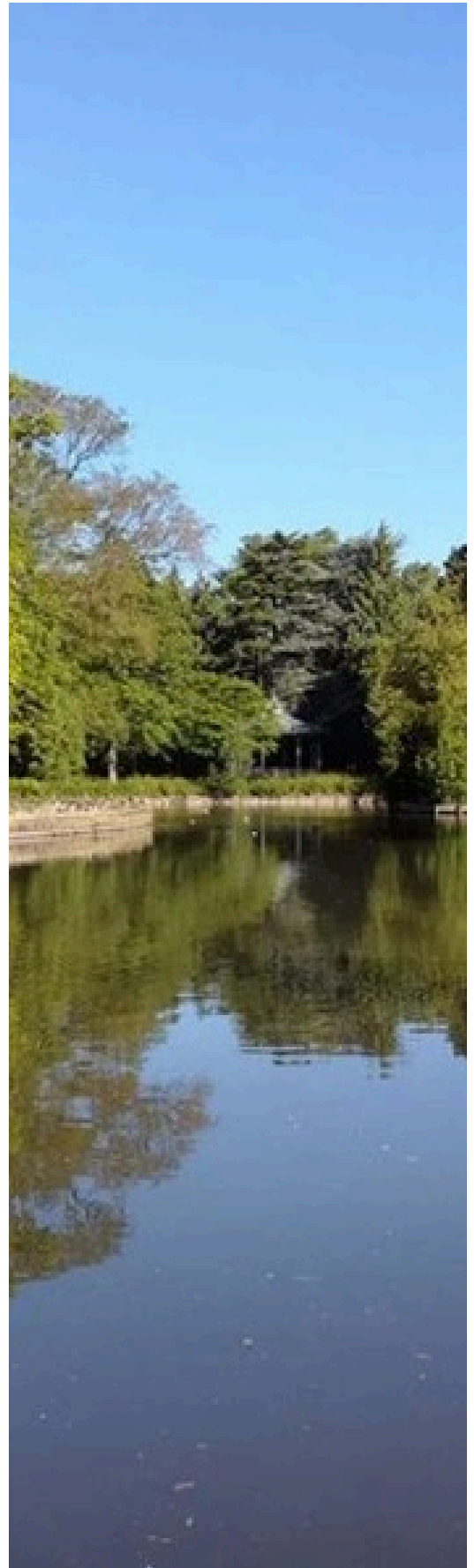
---

## DARLINGTON

Darlington is a Unitary Authority with a population of over 108,000 (2021 Census) which is expected to continue to grow over the coming years. It is an historic market town, surrounded by open countryside with many attractive rural villages. Darlington has an ageing population with approximately 20% of the population over 65 years old. Unemployment in Darlington (3.6%) is marginally higher than the national average but relatively low for the Northeast.

The town lies on the northern bank of the River Tees and is considered the gateway to the Tees Valley and the wider Northeast. There is easy access to the A1(M) and A66 and to the cities of Newcastle, York, Leeds and Durham. The east coast main line runs through the town providing regular services to London and Scotland, plus cross-country services to Birmingham, the North West and the South West. Teesside International airport is a small regional airport within 15 minutes drive of the town centre. Darlington is also within an hours travelling of Teesdale, Weardale, the North Yorkshire Moors, the Yorkshire Dales and the Lake District National Park.

The town's development has been closely associated with the railway age and manufacturing. This past industrial activity has also bestowed a wealth of buildings of architectural and historic interest dating







from that time and the subsequent Victorian period, complementing buildings reflecting the town's Quaker heritage. The Borough's range of cultural facilities, such as the Dolphin Centre, the Hippodrome Theatre and the Hopetown Railway Museum, contribute to a good quality of life and help attract visitors.

The town's schools and colleges achieve some of the highest results in the country. Teesside University has a campus in the centre of the town. Major employers include public administration, health, education, and the service sectors. The recent relocation of part of HM Treasury to the town has brought in families and further employment opportunities. The town remains a centre for engineering with around 5,000 people employed in the manufacturing industry. The Hitachi train building plant is just outside the town boundary and a national biologics manufacturing centre close to the railway station. The excellent road links have encouraged several distribution companies to establish themselves here, including Amazon.



