



THE PARISH OF S. HELEN AUCKLAND



PARISH PROFILE 2025

INTRODUCTION

In the name of Jesus Christ welcome to the Parish Church of Auckland S. Helen in the Diocese of Durham. Situated in the southwest of the County of Durham it is in the Deanery of Auckland. It serves the villages of St. Helen Auckland, West Auckland, Tindale Crescent, Spring Gardens, Bildershaw and Hummerbeck. The villages comprise a mixture of private and social housing and a large and expanding retail park which will include a cinema and possibly a bowling alley. The town of Bishop Auckland borders on the parish. Home to the magnificent Auckland Palace and the acclaimed Kynren Outside Spectacle it has seen a surge in visitors, with new art galleries, independent shops and community-driven projects. Bishop Auckland is fast becoming a cultural hub in County Durham. Lying at the gateway to the picturesque Wear and Tees Valleys the parish is some 10 miles from the historic city of Durham and some 20 miles from the east coast. It has good road and rail links being 5 miles from the main north-south motorway (A1M) and 8 miles from the main cross Pennine road link (A66). The main London to Edinburgh railway line has a main station at Darlington which is 10 miles away and where there is also a connecting line to Bishop Auckland. The vibrant city of Newcastle is 45 minutes away by car and a further 30 minute drive is Northumbria with its award winning beaches and medieval castles.

The current population of the parish is 6108 (Source: Church Urban Fund).

We are an Anglican church in the Catholic tradition . The PCC has made special arrangements with the Bishop of Durham on the grounds of theological conviction regarding the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood and the Episcopate in accordance with the House of Bishops' Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests. We receive alternative Episcopal oversight from the Bishop of Beverley (currently Bishop Stephen Race) and we are affiliated to the Society. The parish has traditionally been staffed by members of the Society of the Holy Cross.

Central to the life of our parish church is the daily celebration of the Mass where the people of God receive Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion. It is here too that the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Helen and the Communion of Saints are sought. It is where members of

our community are baptised, couples are joined together in holy matrimony and the last farewells are said to the faithful departed.

S. Helen's is a beautiful medieval parish church tracing its origins back some 900 years. It has benefitted from three major and one minor restoration projects/extensions in the last 25 years.

Adjacent to the church is the former Victorian vicarage which on the retirement of the previous incumbent was sold by the diocese. However a modern 4 bedroomed property set in its own grounds has been purchased by the diocese to serve as the new vicarage. This property is some 5 minutes walk from the Church.



Rear elevation of new vicarage



Front elevation of the new vicarage

The large churchyard surrounding the church is officially closed. It contains several graves of historic interest. The parish is registered with the Eco Church scheme. It has recently gained the Bronze Award and is now working towards the Silver Award and ultimately the Gold Award. The churchyard will play an important part in this scheme through the study and support of the flora and fauna found there.

S. Helen's has a faithful congregation with an age range of between 5 and 99 years of age.

Most members of the congregation live within the parish boundaries whilst others travel in from nearby towns. The ethnicity of the parish covers people from Nigeria, India, the Philippines and Slovakia.

OUR AIM

Our aim is to continue to reach out to the wider community of the Parish and to spread the word of God and the teachings of Christ. We want our church to flourish and grow in God's name and serve the local community.



Jolly Tots and Busy Bees meet in the Parish Centre



Beavers and Cubs prepare to take part in Mass



S. Helen's is the home church for
Bishop Auckland 2505 Squadron RAFAC



S. Helen's in winter

OUR MISSION

Our Mission is to grow in numbers to the Service of God by reaching out and serving the wider community. Currently there are several opportunities to do this:

- Jolly Tots and Busy Bees. These are weekly opportunities for pre-school children and their carers to take part in stories and crafts with a free lunch available.
- Support for bereaved families by clergy visits before and after a funeral
- Maintaining contact with the newly baptised by sending cards on the anniversary of their baptism
- Visits to the two Nursing Homes in the parish by clergy and members of the congregation
- Continue with different forms of service such as the continuation of Messy Church on Saturdays as changes in family structures can mean that Sunday worship is no longer viable for some families
- Continue with special services for the three local primary schools at Easter, Harvest and Christmas and enable the children to use the church space for religious studies
- Enable the uniformed organisations, Scouts, Guides, Air Training Corp to continue their links with the church.
- Continue with a monthly quiz.
- We have recently re-launched Welcoming Spaces with a Weekly Soup + Bingo session in the Parish Centre
- Monthly lunch time Music Recitals in church followed by a simple lunch in the Ark
- The use of the Ark and the church for the regional RSM music examinations
- Monthly meeting of the Local History Society
- To continue advertising widely social events to which everyone is welcome through the use of Facebook, the church website and through posters in the villages and local press
- Continue assemblies in the three primary schools and involvement with the Governing bodies.

These are things which we currently do: we would be keen for a new priest to support us in these events and to extend them.

OUR NEW PRIEST

We are looking for an energetic person dedicated to their calling through following the word of God and the sacrament in the Catholic tradition of the church. We would ask that he:

- Respects and upholds the traditions of the church and its liturgy
- Has a strong commitment and dedication to the leadership of pastoral care and to build, guide and support outreach teams
- Has a clear vision for growing the church
- Is someone who can recognise the many talents of the laity, to be able to trust, listen to and delegate
- Is someone who has good time management skills
- Is able to strengthen ecumenical links with other churches in the Auckland Deanery and the Diocese of Durham



Easter Sunday 2024

Our new Priest will experience challenges: the parish is in the bottom 10% of deprivation in the country (Source: Church Urban Fund) but it is among welcoming people in a caring community in a beautiful area.

Generous expenses are paid to enable the Priest to further develop Mission Opportunities within the Parish.

Over the last 20 years we have been a Training Parish for 3 curates.

During the interregnum services have been covered primarily by retired clergy and Society clergy. We have two other supportive, retired priests in the congregation. We have a supportive and proactive PCC. We are also well supported by Society priests and congregations within the Diocese. Members of the congregation have many talents on which the priest can draw from fund raising to joinery to baking! We are also very well supported by members of the wider community such as West Auckland WI, the Local History Society and by the local Craft Club.

THE CHURCH AND ITS PEOPLE

Our worship is centred on the sacrament of Holy Communion. Mass, continues to be celebrated with full ceremonial at 10am every Sunday. Until the retirement of the current incumbent Mass was also celebrated at the following times:

- Monday: 7pm
- Tuesday, Friday, Saturday: 9.30am
- Wednesday: 10am. This service continues during the interregnum and continues to be well attended.

The Sunday attendance is between 40 and 65, the Wednesday attendance is between 23 and 28 and the Messy Church attendance is between 10-30.

An organ Mass is celebrated on some weekday feasts and full sung Mass on major festivals. The Triduum is celebrated fully and well supported at Easter.



Lighting the fire at the Easter Vigil

The Easter Vigil concludes with fireworks and a parish party.

S. Helen's Day is a major event.

There are currently 125 people on the Electoral Roll. The congregation comprises an age range of 5 to 99. It is made up of people who live in the parish, people who live in Bishop Auckland and those from further afield who appreciate the form of worship which we offer. The Congregation is a range of ethnicities including Nigeria, India, the Philippines and Slovakia.

During Sunday Mass we have a Sunday School led by two members of the congregation. They were four young members of the congregation confirmed in January 2025.

We are fortunate to have a highly qualified organist and a choir of 12 people. Four members of the choir, including a fourteen-year old girl, have achieved the Singing for Life Bronze Award. The choir regularly takes part in Society parishes events in the Deanery. We also have an eleven-year old Organ Scholar who has achieved the first RSCM award.

We have a regular team of servers of varying ages who are members of the Guild of Servants of the Sanctuary.

Messy Church is held once a month on Saturday mornings.

Lent and Advent courses are held in conjunction with another society parish some seven miles away. Society churches in the Deanery meet for services during Advent, Passiontide and festival days.

Stations of the Cross are held with our Roman Catholic friends and rotate across the three churches, S. Helen's, S. Mary's R.C church and S. Wilfrid's R.C. church in Bishop Auckland.

S. Helen's has an active Walsingham Cell and members of the congregation make an annual pilgrimage to Walsingham as well as attending the National Pilgrimage at Walsingham. In the past our teenagers have attended the Youth Pilgrimage at Walsingham and we would be keen to continue with this.

There are two Nursing Homes in the parish. Some eleven people from S. Helen's Nursing Home which is adjacent to the Parish Centre join Jolly Tots and Busy Bees for lunch each week. We are currently looking at the possibility of getting the Nursing Homes involved with our choir for hymn singing and the possibility of using Zoom to occasionally transmit the Sunday Mass to the Nursing Homes as we did during the Covid Lockdown.

Currently members of the congregation support the Children's Society and the Additional Curates' Society. Several members of the congregation are members of the Society of Mary and the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament as well as our own Walsingham Cell. We also host meetings of the Society of Mary and the Guild of Servers of the Sanctuary.

Through our well supported Planned Giving Scheme members of the congregation support the upkeep of the church through either weekly envelopes or Standing Order.

THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

As with most village churches the local community visit their parish church for the three major offices of Baptism, Marriage and Funerals. It is often after these services that people start coming to church services on a regular basis.

Currently we keep in touch with the wider community via our web page which can be found at www.sthelenschurch.co.uk and a " Church Near You" and through our regularly updated Facebook page, [St Helen's Church West Auckland](#). The weekly Pew Sheet is emailed to over 70 members of the church and local community and copies are left in the church porch, which is left open during the day.

Members of the community regularly attend such events as parish lunches, afternoon teas, Brass on the Grass, music concerts and the monthly quiz. Our annual Christmas Fayre, our major fund-raising activity, is always well attended and supported by the local community.



When asked why they attended social events at S. Helen's, one member of the local community who never comes to church services replied that it was because of the friendly welcome which they receive at these events. Home Communion is distributed to housebound members of the community by a member of the laity in the absence of an incumbent if they request it. Recently two members of the community created a banner for S. Helen's which can be used at Society events.

The church benefits from having two community buildings. The Ark is attached to the church and can host events for up to 40 people: the Parish Centre in close proximity to the church can hold events for up to 150 people. The Parish Centre which is used for larger parish events is also currently in use 4 evenings per week by the Scout and Guide organisations, every Saturday morning by Slimming World and rented out to the local community for parties, Well Being events, elections etc. The centre is modern and in good order.

Since the building of the extension to the church and the improvement to the Parish Centre we are able to reach out to the wider community in several ways. The recent improvements to the Parish Centre were largely funded by Believe Housing. This enables us to run the weekly Jolly Tots and the weekly Busy Bees sessions. These are run by members of the church congregation for children under school age and their carers. Craft activities, play activities and stories take place and a free lunch is provided. Currently some eleven people from the nearby Nursing Home join them for lunch. It also hosts a weekly Welcoming Spaces Soup + Bingo on a Monday afternoon.

The Parish Centre was previously a Council Sports Hall and has had extensive alterations so we now have a large function hall and smaller lounge area both of which have recently had windows added. This has made a vast difference to the ambience of the building. The extension to the church, known as the Ark has Wifi links and thanks to the purchase of computers and a printer, computer lessons for beginners are available. The room is used by the Local History Society. It also uses the churchyard for research. The Ark is also used for a community craft group. The church is the regional centre for the RSM music examinations.



A member of the community at the Computer course

S. Helen's has close links with the local primary schools: this is being maintained during the interregnum by a member of the congregation. There are three primary schools in the parish and we have close links with one of the secondary schools in Bishop Auckland. The previous incumbent was a governor at one of the schools and chair of governors at another. The curate was a governor at the third school. Both the priest and the curate took monthly assemblies in the three schools. The children visit the church for services such as Easter, Harvest and Christmas. The church is also used by the schools and the Scout and Guide groups for study purposes. They and members of the community are actively involved with the Eco Awards. Either the priest or the curate has been the link to the Bishop Auckland Air Training Corp: they hold their annual service in S. Helen's.

THE CHURCH AND ITS BUILDINGS



S. Helen's is a medieval Church which can trace its history back to c1120. It contains some beautiful stained glass including the east window which was designed by Charles Eamer Kempe.

In 2001, thanks to the efforts of the congregation and generous grants from major Trust Funds, a major restoration took place. The floors in the chancel, the nave and the side aisles were replaced with stone slabs, a new heating system was installed including under-floor heating, the walls reverted to lime-wash to enable the building to "breathe" and the pine pews were replaced with oak pews donated by members of the congregation. New Stations of the Cross, again donated by members of the congregation were hung.

In 2008 a major restoration of the organ took place. It is now a beautiful instrument which is carefully looked after and tuned regularly.

In 2018, following three years of fund raising and seeking grants from the major Trust Funds, the Ark was consecrated and opened. It includes a breakfast bar, toilet and community space.

The vestry has also benefitted from a bespoke oak refurbishment including an altar frontal chest.

Currently, work has begun to raise funding for the replacement of the roof. This will be no mean feat and one of the tasks for our new priest will be to support the laity in their efforts to achieve this major work.

Currently the church pays its Quota of £30,000 to the Diocese and for the last 25 years we have paid our promised pledge in full and it has been within 5% of the suggested pledge from the diocese. This is achieved largely by Planned Giving. Currently we have 55 people who give regularly either through weekly envelopes or through Standing Order.

S. Helen's is in possession of a Trust Fund known as the Nicholson Trust. It has recently been left a legacy by a deceased member of the congregation. The church also owns a three-bedroom detached house close to the church. This was purchased for use by the curate: it is currently rented out and the church receives the rent.

A Message from the Bishop of Beverley

"Thank you for prayerfully considering St Helen's for the next phase of your priestly ministry. This is a wonderful parish that is at the heart of its community and is committed to sharing the Gospel confidently within the traditional Catholic charism of the Church of England and Diocese of Durham. Please be in touch with me if you have any questions, but do also visit the parish and see for yourself all that it has to offer and all that it needs from it's new priest to enable it to flourish in the years to come. +Stephen Beverley"

THE DIOCESE OF DURHAM VACANCY AUDIT REPORT

Over a period of 5 sessions the PCC have completed the Vacancy Audit Report as required by Durham Diocese assisted by Martin Howard (Diocesan Buildings For Mission Secretary)

This included verification that the vacancy is 'one full-time post'.



