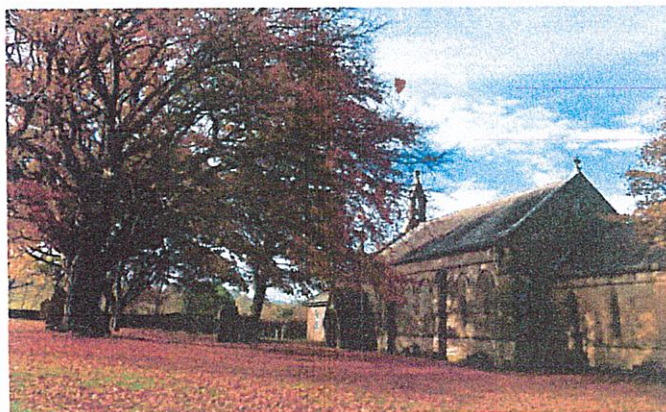
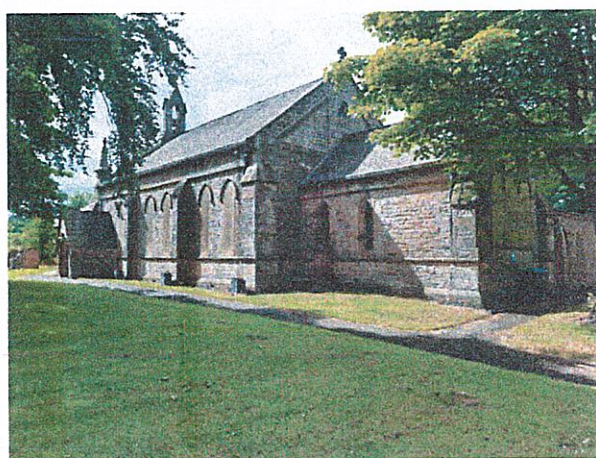


St Thomas the Apostle

Harelaw and Annfield Plain



A Church for All Seasons



PARISH PROFILE 2024

ST THOMAS CHURCH, HARELAW

1 Who are we?

We are a church open to all forms of worship but have always maintained a strong eucharistic tradition. Our worship has been facilitated by the presence of a Licensed Reader who will continue to support our new incumbent. Our committed congregation has always offered strong support for our priest-in-charge and for church projects of all types, (missional, outreach, fundraising, etc.). We seek to support the diocesan priorities of Children, Growth and Poverty Relief, (which have been at the forefront of all our efforts for many years), by giving ourselves to God and the community, identifying needs and working to fulfil them. We are a parish which is built on love - for God, for our brothers and sisters both in and out of the church community, and for all of God's glorious creation. We also continue to serve the needs of our local community as well as several charities.



This is our inclusion statement:

"We believe in an inclusive church which does not discriminate on any level. whether age, economic power, mental health, mental ability, physical capability, race or sexuality. We believe in a church which welcomes, accepts and serves all people in the name of Jesus Christ and which encourages every individual to develop their God-given gifts and use them in God's service."

We seek to live as Christ would want us to in God's world, working to bring in the kingdom.

2 Our Priest:

- will have a strong faith built on a foundation of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit, and will work with us to develop a vision for the future of our parish.
- will respect our eucharistic traditions but will also be prepared to explore new patterns of worship which may be more readily accessible to people with different church traditions - or none! - which we hope will encourage increased church membership.

- will work well in team and be happy to respect and consider the experience of others but also be confident enough to lead and instruct when necessary.
- will be forward-looking and enthusiastic, strongly committed to pastoral care, and to growing the church family in the community.
- will be able to recognise the differing needs of lively and community-minded parishes, balancing the requirements for the good of all. We look forward to learning from each other and employing all our knowledge, experience and skills in God's service.
- will recognise and nurture the gifts of individuals, giving them confidence to use those gifts in God's service.
- will continue our ecumenical involvement and support our charitable activities, taking an active role in the community.
- will work with us to attract and retain new families and people of all ages into the church community with a range of worship styles - the church is no longer "one size fits all" and this needs to be reflected in the services offered.
- will strengthen and maintain our well-established links with Catchgate Primary School, Annfield Plain Infant School and the Croft, and encourage the development of links with other schools in the parish.
- will be able to respond to the changing needs of the community and will work with us to identify needs - both spiritual and physical - and determine ways of filling these.

We welcome the ministry of any individual who feels that they are called by God to rise to the unique and exciting opportunities we will encounter.



3 A bit about the Parish

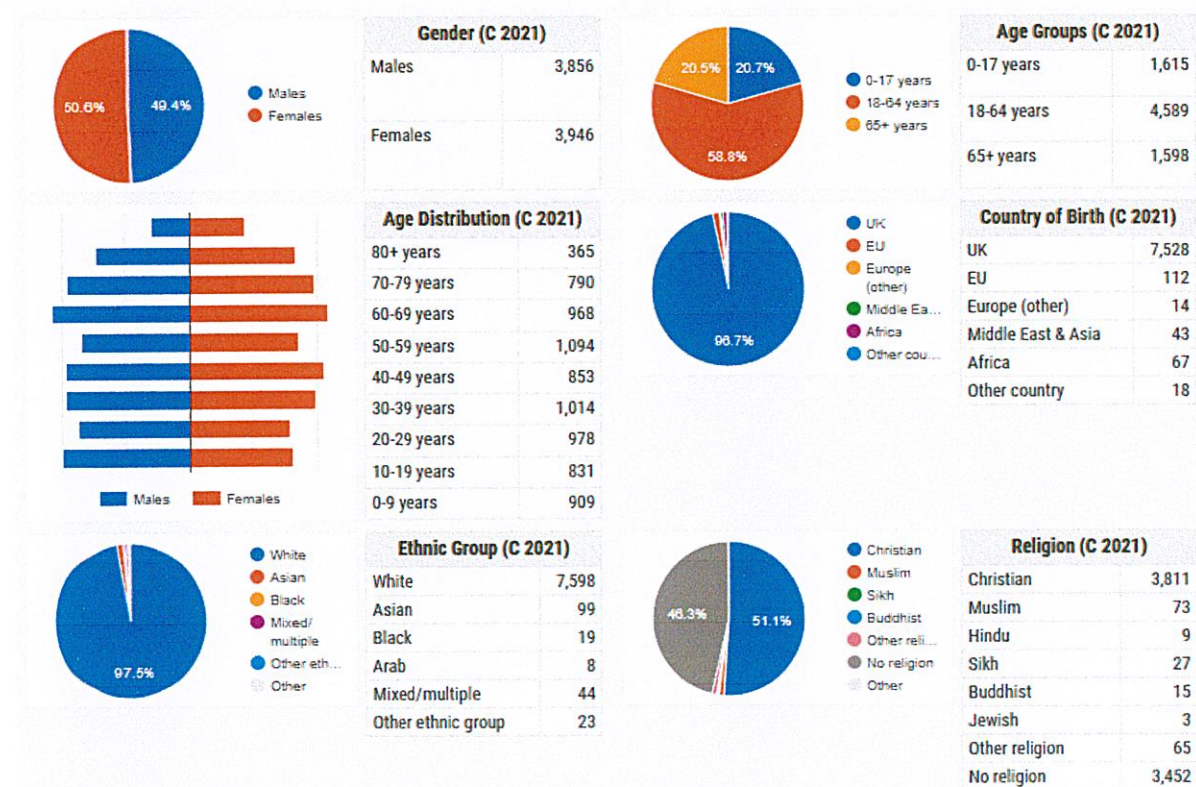
Harelaw and Annfield Plain are former pit villages in County Durham situated between the towns of Stanley to the North-East and Consett to the west. The name “Annfield Plain” is thought to derive from two sources: “the fields of An” a man who lived there before the Norman conquest, and the wagonway, (Loud Hill inclined plane, over which coal was hauled from the local pits by standing engine.)

The population of the parish in 2021 from the UK Office of National Statistics is shown below. Until seven years ago, two joint benefice churches were active for worship - St Aidan in Annfield Plain, and St Thomas in Harelaw. Sadly, St Aidan could not be maintained, and the congregations were merged into the church of St Thomas, serving the people of Harelaw, Annfield Plain, Greencroft, Catchgate, West Kyo and New Kyo. This amalgamation has worked well, though it has meant that some congregation members have had an increased journey to church.

Further information about the population structure is shown below (Source: UK Office for National Statistics (web).) The web address below includes a map of the Annfield and Harelaw showing boundaries and population centres.

https://www.citypopulation.de/en/uk/northeastengland/county_durham/E63000155__annfield_plain/

Population Statistics for the Parish of Harelaw and Annfield Plain



The Parish Website can be found at: www.achurchnearyou.com/church/13514/

There is also Face book page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1414254952193260/>

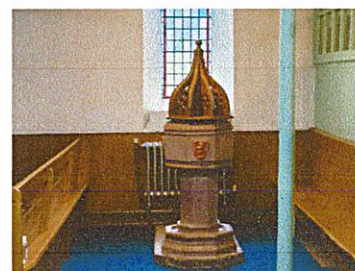
4 Our Role in the Community

4a Services. Our regular services are shown below, but we appreciate that there may need to be changes in service times to accommodate the needs of St, James, Burnopfield when the parishes are merged, and that both congregations may need to find compromise. Our regular Sunday service is currently held at 9:45 a.m. and is most commonly a Eucharistic Service, with an occasional Service of the Word led by the Reader. We also enjoy a Thursday service of Morning Prayer, often lay led.

In addition to this, we hold a eucharistic service in Castle Court (a retirement accommodation) on the last Wednesday each month starting at 11:30 a.m, followed by tea / coffee and biscuits and conversation, (sometimes focused, sometimes general socialisation). This service is most usually led by a Priest. The congregation at this service usually numbers around 10/11, some of whom are unable to attend the Sunday service.

We have recently re-started supporting church involvement in Stoneleigh Care Home in conjunction with Annfield Plain Methodist Church, re-establishing the ecumenical links which were largely lost during Covid. This is a more relaxed occasion as the home cares for many people with severe difficulties and dementia, and comprises a short prayer and reading, and a number of hymns. It is very popular with the residents.

4b Occasional Offices - Baptisms are conducted by appointment at 12:30 p.m. Weddings are organised as required, Funeral service arrangements are as required. The Reader is licensed for funeral ministry. Confirmations are as required by arrangement with the priest. A church member is able to provide personalised candles for baptismal and wedding services, which adds special touch.



In 2023 the figures for the occasional offices were as follows:

Baptisms - 6

Marriages - 2

Funerals - 5

There were also a number of funerals held at the crematorium.

4c Music We are usually blessed with organ accompaniment and have three organists who regularly play. If an organist is unavailable we make use of downloaded music and Spotify, or sing *a cappella* when appropriate.

4d Ministry and Outreach We use the main church area for the major Festivals of Christmas and Easter, and these provide a platform from which to reach out to invite members of the community to share worship with us. Christmas in particular lends us many opportunities, and our church provides a venue for school carol services for Catchgate Primary School and Croft Community School.

We are part of the “Prayer Spaces in Schools” initiative, assisting school leavers to reflect and feel encouraged about moving from primary to secondary education.



In the past we hosted a regular Summer Fayre, and also a “Family Film Day” during the school summer holidays for children and their parents. The “Family Film Day” was a free event which was well-supported. Everyone enjoyed an age-appropriate animated film followed by a buffet lunch. This was not just an opportunity to encourage people into the church building but was a practical way of providing a meal for children whose parents may be struggling to feed them during the summer break when free school meals aren’t available. The film day was advertised in the Community Centre in Annfield Plain, as well as in church. We would very much like to re-establish this as soon as it is practical.

We have an excellent relationship with the Head Teacher and staff at Catchgate Primary School. It is a venue for some church fundraising activities.

There is a small fund of money available to fund a “Supper Club” when the opportunity arises.

Members of St Thomas’ congregation are also actively involved in volunteering with a “Kids’ Club” held at Burnhope Community Centre, in collaboration with St John’s, Burnhope. The club was enjoyed this year by 20 children from 15 families. It was held on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and ran for the six weeks of the school summer holiday, providing a meal and activities to local children at no cost. The Tuesday session was funded by Lanchester PCC, and the Wednesday by the Burnhope Community Centre. The volunteers for both days were from All Saints, St Johns and St Thomas making this a truly Christian collaborative effort.

Open the book The Open the Book team visits four schools regularly to share a story from the Bible. This was established before Covid and has proved enormously popular with the children, the staff, and the team itself! The welcome we receive in the school is wonderful. The core team of 6 is made up from 3 church congregations

within our deanery as well as clergy. We visit four schools within our deanery at the moment and are blessed to include people of many complementary talents, including a very gifted seamstress who makes our simple but effective costumes. We hope that this collaboration with All Saints and St John's will continue after the boundary changes take place but appreciate that this may not be practical.

We also encourage school services at end of term, Christmas, Easter and other visits to church. Our community room walls are decorated with the children's artwork.

4e Adult Groups

These include:

- Mothers' Union who meet on the first Monday of each month at 2:00 p.m. The 12 members enjoy a short service followed by talk from an invited speaker and refreshments.
- Bible and Bait - a study group currently led by a reader-in-training which meets fortnightly at 5:30 p.m. for a shared meal and bible study.
- Faith, Food and Fellowship - this popular group has just recently re-started having had to close during lockdown. Members meet monthly on the second Wednesday of the month at 11:30 a.m. to share a short worship, a faith lunch, and discussion around a topic, and general socialising. It is totally lay led.
- A Ladies' Community Craft (The Cree) group rents the community room on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, which provides a small income as well as a benefit to the community.

4f Fundraising and Social Events



A fundraising committee works tirelessly to raise funds for vital repairs and renovations. Funds are also raised for the benefit of the local and larger community - e.g. Harvest lunch. The parish is one of the poorer areas of the UK and there is a great need for practical help of this type.

4g Our Church Building

The church of St Thomas was built in 1840/41 to the designs of George Jackson of Durham, and in a simple early English Style. The original building consisted of an aisle-less nave and a chancel. The two vestries and organ chamber were added later on the north side of the chancel and a rear porch to the south side of the nave along with a rear balcony. In the 1980s a community room with lobby, toilets and kitchen was added to the west end of the church. It was extended and re-modelled in the early 2000s. The current accommodation is well suited to the current needs of the parish, being neither too big nor too small.



Prior to lockdown extensive renovations were carried out on the church building to deal with damp and to update and improve the community room and kitchen, including lighting, heating and new fittings in the kitchen. We also retained a builder to complete major repairs to the roof, plaster and redecoration, and replacement of two pairs of entrance doors. Unfortunately, this work was not carried out to an appropriate standard and further work will be required. Architect's plans have been drawn up to bring this up to standard, and money is available for this. We also intend to open up the interior space of the church to make it more versatile for both church and general community use.

The churchyard is closed to further burials and in the capable care of Durham County Council.

4h Our Congregation

We have a regular congregation of around 30, and others who attend as health allows, as well as 6/7 housebound church members who receive communion in their own homes, often administered by a lay church member. Lay church members also visit those who are unable to attend to provide comfort and conversation, and help in small practical ways, eg shopping. There is a regular reading rota of 12 individuals, and an intercessors' rota has recently been established.

5 Parish Finances

The church members give generously and also work hard to raise funds. As a result, the PCC is able to pay its way, including a monthly contribution of £1,000 to the diocese.

The fortunes of the parish were transformed in 2018 by a bequest of £259,000. A significant part of this has been allocated to carrying out long outstanding works to the church building, as reported elsewhere, and the parish is left financially sound with over £142,000 invested and paying interest. Accounts for 2023 are available, as is a report on the first months of 2024. An Appendix is attached.

6 PCC

Currently 10 members (excluding priest) who meet on a regular basis.

7 What Next for Us?

- We are praying for a priest who will have the skill and enthusiasm to help us build the church into the thriving, community-serving family of God we are confident it will become, sharing ideas and energy as we look forward to joining with the parish of Burnopfield. Developing our children's services other than OTB, for example some Sunday worship for children. Since Covid, Children's church has not been re-introduced and we are very keen for it to restart to accommodate the new children in our area. Currently the children only attend at Christmas and Easter, and we feel this is a major gap in our services. Prior to lockdown we had a thriving Messy Church and would like to re-instate this. Our volunteers are very keen to go forward with the help of a supportive priest.
- We regard ourselves as missional and evangelical in that we strive to preach the Gospel in our lives and actions, as well as in our worship. Nurturing and caring for each other and the community are our priorities. We are very aware that we have an ageing congregation and need to attract and retain younger church members to worship alongside us. We love our church and are prepared to adapt as required to continue to work God's mission out in the world. The incumbent will have the support of a licensed Reader in addition to two churchwardens, an active PCC, and the backing of the congregation.

- We are working towards Challenging Poverty in practical terms and hope that when the restructuring and renovations to the church building are completed, we will be able to offer food, warm spaces, and a public space that we can utilise to fulfil the needs of the community as they become apparent.
- We seek to determine each person's unique, God-given gifts, and to encourage them to use their talents in God's service. There is a strong lay involvement in the church, and this is a huge advantage in carrying out tasks both in church and the community. The incumbent can expect to have full support of the congregation.
- All church members are looking forward to supporting our new incumbent, with prayer and practical assistance. This will be a wonderful opportunity for the right person to contribute to building a unique new church family at Harelaw & Annfield Plain and Burnopfield & Dipton.

8 Local Amenities

Our soon-to-be-sister-church of St James, Burnopfield has described the local attractions beautifully, and we would refer you their Parish Profile.

