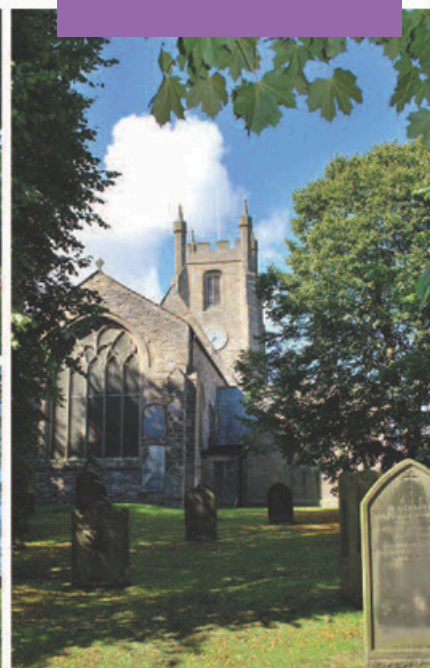




DIOCESE
OF DURHAM



PARISH PROFILE

Team Vicar (0.5 stipend)

2025

- *Bishop Middleham*
- *Fishburn*
- *Sedgefield*
- *Trimdon Grange*
- *Trimdon Village*



PARISH OF THE
UPPER SKERNE
— COUNTY DURHAM —



2025 marked the 20th anniversary of the creation of the Parish of the Upper Skerne. We have celebrated our unity and plurality as a combined parish with a series of events intended to strengthen the bonds within the parish; the centrepiece being a combined parish service on Trinity Sunday where we celebrated the unity and plurality of the life of God. God seems to be ushering us into a new season; new life, green shoots, new reason to hope. This has been incredibly exciting, and good reason to move forward with hope. One Parish, Moving Forward has been the motto for this year's celebrations, harkening back to St Paul's own words, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus".

In 'straining forward', we have discerned together our common Mission Statement that will be used as a tool to guide the parish in participating in the Missio Dei.

GK Chesterton once said, "The human mind, like the human mouth, is meant to close upon something solid. Otherwise, it becomes like the city sewer, rejecting nothing". Intimately connected with this notion of space is the idea of capacity; capacity for God. Opening space could refer to questions about service times, or church plants. It could refer to certain ministries and outreach endeavours. All of which are valid and important considerations as we discern what God is calling us to.

However, 'Opening Space' is not some arbitrary open-ended goal, but is intended to refer specifically to the capacity of every individual and community, every human soul to receive God by Faith. It is about being open to God and His purposes in the community. It therefore is about the Church being God's Holy Temple inspired by the Spirit of God. It is about proclaiming the Word of God with joy so to invite others to know themselves to be beloved children of God; created in His image and saved by the Blood of the Lamb. We therefore understand that in participating in God's Mission in this place, our primary role is to be the means by which individual lives and our entire communities are transformed into God's Image.

Our Mission is to:

'Together, Glorify Jesus Christ, by Opening Space in which people might Meet With and Go Deeper with God as part of a Lifelong Journey of Discipleship'.

Our next Team Vicar (0.5)

It is an exciting time to join the Parish of the Upper Skerne.

You will be joining growing churches with a newly formed ministry team. Revd David Lucas joined the parish as Team Rector in June 2024.

Since David's arrival, we have started more pioneering ministries, and we've begun to see people come to faith for the first time.

We've recently had a newly ordained Distinctive Deacon join us in the parish and we have an additional proposal for a youth-focussed role that's under consideration.

We clearly stand in the Anglican tradition and theology, with a clear missional commitment to reaching out today.

We are looking for a colleague to join the ministry team who will:

- Share our Anglican theology drawing from the evangelical, Anglo-catholic and charismatic streams.
- Provide a pastoral role. A 'faithful and stable' personality who can help the parishes flourish through growth and change.
- Be adept at teaching and catechising – passion for discipleship and willingness to engage in these conversations 11, in schools and with congregations.

You will be supported by a collaborative, and missional-minded Team Rector. This is not the first half-time role we've had in the parish and we have realistic expectations of the scope of the role and how a half-time Team Vicar fits in.



Bishop Middleham



Fishburn meadows



Hurworth Burn



St. Alban's Church, Trimdon Grange



St Catherine's Church, Fishburn



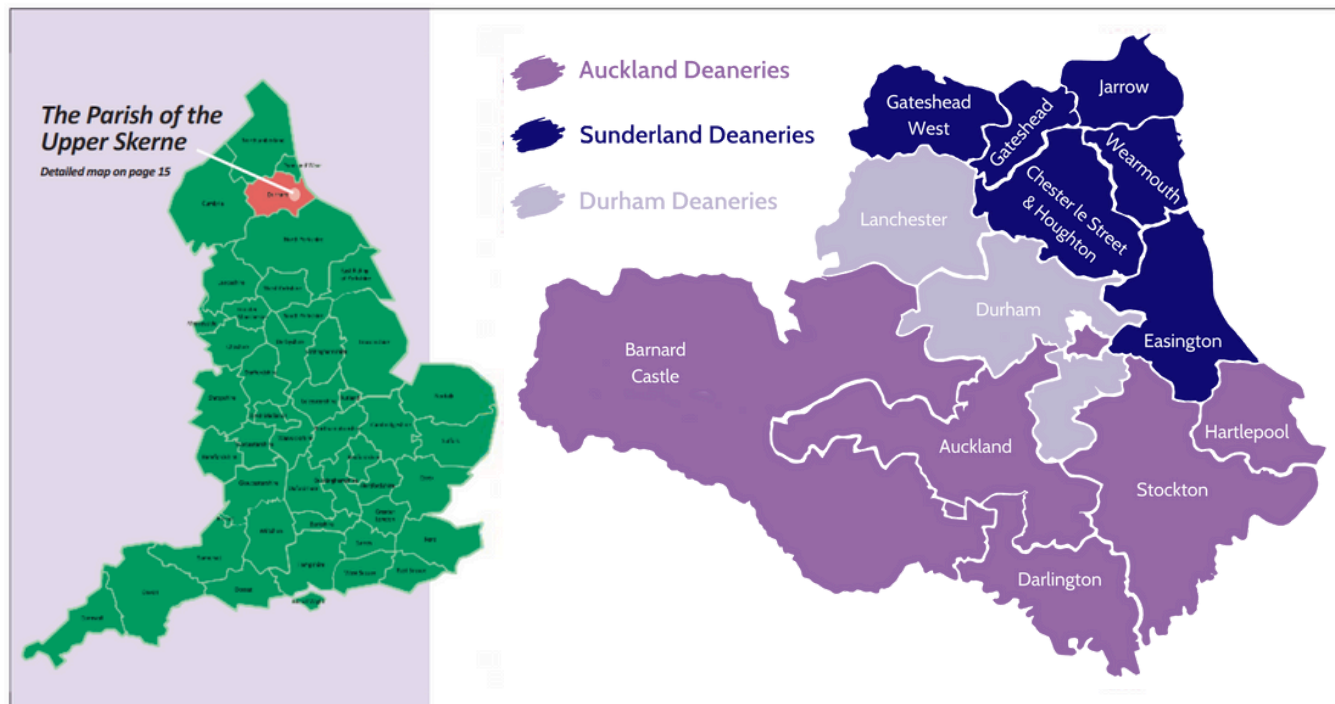
Hurworth Burn



The Way of Love, Trimdon Village



St Edmund's Church, Sedgfield



Parish Setting and Description

The Parish of the Upper Skerne was formed in April 2005, combining the parishes of Sedgfield and Fishburn, Bishop Middleham, and the Joint Benefice of the Trimdons. The settlements comprise a small market town, two rural villages, and three former mining communities.

It consists of five churches, set in the communities of Bishop Middleham, Fishburn, Sedgfield, Trimdon Grange and Trimdon Village. St Paul's in Trimdon Station was closed in the autumn of 2007 because low attendance and lack of income meant it was no longer a viable worship centre.

There is an open churchyard at Bishop Middleham. the churchyard at Trimdon Village, maintained by Trimdon Parish Council, is closed to burials but has recently been the subject of a Faculty to extend the Garden of Remembrance for the interment of ashes. The churchyard at Sedgfield is closed and maintained by Durham County Council.

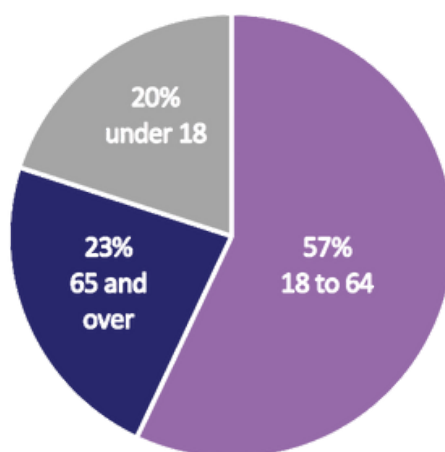
• **Electoral roll:** 186

• **Usual Sunday attendance:** 126 for a fortnightly cycle of services. Many families continue to have their children baptised, even those who rarely attend otherwise.

• **Churchmanship:** this can be described as 'middle of the road'. the eucharist is very important to all our congregations. Vestments are worn in four of the churches and cassock alb and stole in the other. lay people read in all our churches and intercessions are led by laity in some of our churches.

• **Population size:** approx. 20,000

• **Demographics:** some 20% of the population are under 18, with 57% in the 18 to 64 range and 23% being 65 and over.

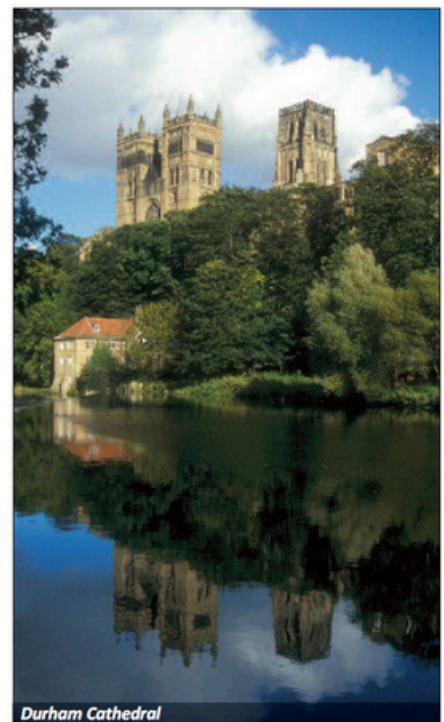


• **Sociologically:** across the Parish the various communities fall within a broad range of the indices of Multiple Deprivation based on finance, education, health and employment. these range from 1/10 in central Sedgfield whilst the former Northern mining communities suffer significant levels of deprivation in the areas of income (8/10), employment (9/10), education and training (8/10), health (9/10) and crime (9/10), where 1/10 is least deprived, and 10/10 is most deprived.

• **Schools:** we have six primary schools in the parish, one of which (St Michael's, Bishop Middleham) is a Church of England school, which was rated outstanding in its 2017 Ofsted inspection. there is one secondary school, Sedgfield Community College (see appendix 1.2).

• **Care homes:** Craigarran; Willowdene; Homebryth (sheltered housing)

• **Shops and other local amenities:** Sedgfield is the most significant shopping centre for the parish, with a Sainsbury's, a Co-op and a variety of independent retailers and other services. it also has a farmers' Market



each month, and a good range of pubs and restaurants. there are small Co-op supermarkets in two of the villages, along with post offices and other small convenience stores in the other villages, plus a variety of other shops, restaurants, pubs and takeaways.

The former rectory in Sedgefield, Ceddesheld hall, is now a community centre run by volunteers, where a wide variety of activities take place. a short walk across the fields from Sedgefield lies Hardwick Park, a council park which is a delightful place to walk at any time of year.

Walkers and cyclists enjoy access to local paths and trails, including the Hurworth Burn path, which forms part of National Cycle Network route 1. The Northern Saints Trail from Hartlepool to Durham, *The Way of Love*, runs through the parish.

Leisure centres are a short distance away in Billingham and Ferryhill; with theatres/art centres in Billingham and Stockton.

Further afield, there is easy access, in an hour or less, to numerous recreational areas, including the north York Moors and Whitby; beaches at Crimdon, Seaton Carew and Saltburn; the Durham Dales; Durham City, Sunderland and Newcastle.

Skerne Medical Group has surgeries in Sedgefield, Fishburn and Trimdon

Colliery. There are dental practices in Sedgefield and hospitals in Stockton, Hartlepool and Middlesbrough.

The population of the parish has grown in recent years with new housing in Fishburn and Sedgefield. The sale of diocesan land in Sedgefield in 2018 continues to be a source of resentment and misunderstandings between the church and the local community, as it was considered to be in a green belt category on the outskirts of Sedgefield.

Our work towards the diocesan priorities includes:

Challenging Poverty

We support the County Durham foodbank, which is part of the Trussell Trust. the PCC has a restricted fund to support refugees

and asylum seekers.

During the winter 2022/23 the parish ran and supported the Warm Spaces project in several of our communities, in collaboration with other churches and community organisations. Harvest service collections are made for designated charities. 50% of donations from weddings, funerals and baptisms go to charities selected by families.

The parish holds special collections for appeals such as the Turkey/Syria Earthquake appeal. There are collections during Lent and at Christmas for particular charities.

Energising growth

The parish has struggled with a shortage of stipendiary clergy





leadership for the better part of the last 9 years. In June 2024 Revd David Lucas became Team Rector of the parish and has put in motion a strategy for future growth. In February 2025, our beloved house for duty priest, Revd Peter Robson, passed away from cancer. He was well loved, and his passing has left quite a hole.

With that said, the church has seen quite significant growth this last year and we are in the process of enabling new lay ministers.

St Mary Magdalene's church in Trimdon Village is on the Northern Pilgrim trail *The Way of Love*. It is open every day, with 'help yourself' refreshments available and is regularly visited by pilgrims. Sleeping in church is even a facility which is available for pilgrims.

We run a very successful Friday Cafe every week in Fishburn Church hall for drinks and conversation. This is well-attended.

The parish has two bereavement support groups which meet regularly and carry out important work to support lonely and bereaved people.

Caring for God's Creation every autumn we mark Creationtide with specially prepared service booklets. We have an active environmental Group which challenged the parish with three campaigns in recent years encouraging sustainable transport, recycling and reducing our carbon footprint. One of our churches recently achieved its Bronze eco-church award and we are pursuing an award for another church in the parish.

One of our churchyards has been re-wilded, with meadow areas, bird boxes and woodland, and we have set aside an area in another churchyard for restoring native grasslands. There was a positive reduction in use of plastic at Christmas and summer fetes.

We have a policy of replacing lighting with LED lights as part of our efforts to reduce our carbon footprint. This work has been completed in three of the five churches.

Engaging with children, youth and young adults

Initiatives aimed at young children include Seeds of Hope, Messy Church and Trimdon Toddlers. An "Open the Book" initiative has been established in Fishburn School already, with a growing team ready to expand to other schools.

Parish clergy presently lead collective worship on a fortnightly basis in St Michael's Church of England School in Bishop Middleham, teach catechisms and conduct worship to mark other significant events in the church and school year. Some of these take





place in school and some in church. Every year the parish gives bibles to the school leavers.

Other churches in the parish regularly welcome school groups for educational visits. St Edmund's in Sedgfield also hosts schools for services at Easter and Christmas. There are well attended Crib services and Christingle services across the parish.

Additional ministries have included a new 'Children's Church' Sunday School program at St Edmund's that will be duplicated at St Catherine's in the coming months. As well, our new 'Youth Network' is due to begin in November, that will include an emphasis on youth apologetics.

New relationships have recently been made with local schools, including with Sedgfield College. There are a handful of children coming forward for confirmation in October, who will later be attending the youth program.

Mission

The agreed trajectory for this last year was to prepare the ground for future development in mission. As mentioned above, this has included the discernment of our new Mission Statement. As we have seen quite a number of new people start attending church, we have recognised the need to feed the people. This has been through Bible Studies, Catechisms, and the development of a *Christianity*

Explored group. It has already been observed that many new doors have been opening since the arrival of the Team Rector; opportunities that need to be acted on in the short term. The task is to move forward steadily with the support of the wider congregation.

There are loving and dedicated teams of willing and faithful parishioners who are excited to grow in the faith and to share it.



Children's activities



St Mary Magdalene's Church, Trimdon

In June 2023 the parish ran the *Finding a Voice* course (lay-led), aiming to encourage and enable people to talk about their faith in the hope that those who attended might choose to continue meeting to learn and grow together in the faith.

In Autumn 2023, the parish worked with the Diocesan Discipleship Advisor who led two discipleship courses to explore how to improve interaction and engagement with baptism families. The expanding Open the Book team has been successful in Fishburn School, and doors have been opened with other schools in the parish. It is the reflection of the Team Rector that the parish is full of opportunity; people are hungry, and are seeking.

We are excited by these 'green shoots' in the parish, and full of hope for how they will deepen our spiritual life and enable us to share the good news with the wider parish.

there is a reticence amongst congregation members to speak openly about faith. However, during Archdeacon Libby's day with them, she noted that they responded well to being asked to talk to each other about the difference knowing Jesus has made in their lives and that they said afterwards that it was not as frightening as they expected.

Growth in the sense of community engagement is reasonably well-addressed, but we recognise that more emphasis should be placed on growth in discipleship and numbers.

• **Finance**

There is a Parish treasurer who manages a central PCC account which deals with wedding and funeral fees and co-ordinates Parish share and Gift aid. At a local level, each church has its own treasurer and finances, with the parish share being allocated by a formula that

takes account of each church's income. The five sets of accounts are merged by the Parish treasurer at the end of each year to provide one set of accounts for the diocese. (See Appendix 2)

The submitted accounts show that current finances are generally healthy. The PCC met with the Diocesan Parish Giving advisor in July 2023.

St Edmund's has a 'friends' group which effectively operates as a restricted reserve for that building. This frees up income for St Edmund's in a way that is not replicated for the other churches. The friends group is an independent group with its own constitution, set of trustees and charity status. It is dedicated to maintaining and restoring the fabric of this Grade one listed building. The funding is generated by annual subscription and fundraising events, and is a unique community asset,

irrespective of religious commitments.

All the churches reported receiving legacies – usually around £5-10k, though St Edmund's and their associated 'friends' group received £100k each.

There has been a resistance to talking about money in the churches, especially where levels of giving are concerned. There is also resistance among some to the Planned Giving system, because of concerns about the potential impact on giving due to allegiances to a local church, and its being a Direct Debit based system with an automatic annual increase (though there was a recognition that there is an opt out).

• Buildings

Maintenance is reasonably up to date and there are no significant worries about upkeep. Substantial works are either approved and going ahead or are planned, including new kitchen, toilets and disabled access at St Catherine's Church hall, following re-roofing. At St Edmund's the raising of the crossing floor, repairs to clock mechanism and faces, and repairs to the bell frame are due to start and renewal

of the boiler at St Michael's has recently been completed.

Because of limited public transport on Sundays, and the very different communities, the PCC feels that all the buildings are essential to maintain access to places of worship across the Parish.

• Governance

The PCC is a body of people who recognise their responsibilities as trustees. There is one PCC which has representatives from every church. There are three District Church Councils: Bishop Middleham, Joint DCC (for Fishburn and the Trimdons) and Sedgefield. All of these governance committees meet regularly. A PCC subcommittee recently revised the governance document which is currently with the Bishop's Council for final approval.

The recently formed Communications Group has representatives from every church, and is working towards a comprehensive communications strategy, including a recent survey of parishioners to assess which forms of communication reach most people

The environmental Group is also a recent addition to our parish life and has done invaluable work (see Caring for God's Creation on page 4).

• Challenges

The predominant demographic of our congregations is elderly with people in their sixties viewed as 'young'. With that said, there are a growing number of young families and young adults in attendance many of whom are new to the faith.

There is an acknowledgement that in order to move forward we need a change of culture. We are gently and patiently moving forward.

With any change, there is difficulty, our task has been to move forward sensitively, respecting what God has done in the past and being ready for what He has for us in the future.

It should also be noted that there had been a lot of hurt from a previous Team Rector and that there is still a distinct need for gentleness as it pertains to future change. The predominant sense is that the congregation needs quite a bit of TLC.



• Service Patterns

It is the intention of the Team Rector to maintain the current service pattern for the time being.

Current service patterns were revised after the churches resumed holding services. Four of our churches now have fortnightly Sunday morning eucharists and one has a monthly Sunday service, with all five congregations coming together to worship on fifth Sundays. There are one or two midweek eucharists per week.

The pattern of daily Morning Prayer was broken during Covid and has only recently been fully restarted. Presently, Morning prayer occurs at a different church each weekday, with only small numbers in attendance.

One of the lasting effects of Covid is that increasingly people travel to churches other than their local church to worship when there is no service in their local church. People also travel to attend and support social and fundraising events in other communities in the parish.

There are Meditation services twice a week: one held on Zoom midweek and the other on a Sunday evening in one of the churches.



St Mary Magdalene's Church, Trimdon, children's Nativity

Seeds of Hope is aimed at children and young people and their carers. It meets in the church in Trimdon Village on the last Saturday of the month for songs, stories, teaching, craft activities, prayer, refreshments and fun! The children take part in leading Sunday worship on Mothering Sunday and Harvest; and prepare a Christmas presentation for the Christingle service in Trimdon.

In 2022 they also delivered their

presentation in Craigarran Nursing Home in Trimdon Colliery, to great acclaim! A strong link continues between *Seeds of Hope* and TrimdonToddlers, which meets in the Village hall.

Food and Faith is a new monthly service at St Alban's. Largely based on contemporary worship music and bible readings; it is intended to be a low barriers type service for new people.



St Michael's Church, Bishop Middleham

Occasional Offices

• Baptisms and Weddings

The Parish Office is the first point of contact for both wedding couples and baptism families.

On average the Parish has 4 baptisms per month. Baptisms are held once a month in each of our churches, with St Catherine's and St Michael's sharing a date (these are the least busy for baptisms). They are separate from the main service, taking place at 12.00 noon and 1.00pm (only one family at a time).

Most baptisms are arranged by e-mail, forms are sent electronically and once returned, a confirmation e-mail is sent. Follow up home visits/telephone calls are done by clergy usually a week before the baptism.

The Parish administrator completes the baptism registers and provides prayer cards, baptism certificates and candles (Deputy Warden completes the register at St Mary Magdalene's). All baptisms are entered in the Parish Diary so that those who need to know can access this information.

The Parish has an average of 8 weddings per year. Weddings are booked in at Vestry Hour which runs once a month (the first Tuesday) from 6pm to 7pm at the Parish Office. Once ID checks and application forms have been completed, the information is put on to the Parish Calendar which is shared by those who need to know (wardens, deputy wardens, clergy, treasurers etc.). At the start of each year the dates are put into the Parish Diary.

Clergy visit the couples to finalise details for their service.

• Funerals

The number of funerals has fallen in recent years. The average in the last three years is 60.

Funeral administration is carried out by our volunteer Funeral Co-ordinator who takes bookings from Funeral Directors and arranges for a minister, retired minister or one of the lay ministers, to take the service. He also arranges with the local church representatives for the church to be open. Fees are also collected and administered by him.



Additional Roles & Support

The Team Rector Rev'd David Lucas is married with 4 school aged children. His overall strengths pertain to Christian education and catechism and has a passion for enabling the laity to realise their own vocation as beloved people of Christ. He is keen to work with a team to help them flourish in their ministry calling.

The parish currently benefits from a Distinctive Deacon as curate, 4 lay preachers who are growing well into their role, as well as two others who are currently training to become Lay Pastoral Ministers.

There is a supportive and committed ministerial team, which meets regularly. We are fortunate to have a number of retired clergy in the parish who offer what they can. Two of them regularly lead worship in the parish. We have two Licensed Lay Ministers (Readers) with PTO, who are also qualified to conduct funerals. Two other lay people have completed the Wings for Worship speaking in Church diocesan training course and have permission to administer Communion by extension; another is attending that training this year. Home Communion is offered across the Parish.

The Parish employs a Parish administrator who works from the well-equipped Parish office in St Alban's Church, Trimdon Grange. The role includes being Parish Safeguarding Officer and PCC Secretary.

The Parish employs an organist who normally plays at St Edmund's

but who also plays at other churches as required on a voluntary basis. We also have three volunteer organists.

We have committed and hard-working people in our churches who are loyal to their local communities and church buildings.



St. Alban's, Trimdon Grange



St Edmund's Church, Sedgefield hosting a recital by The Lyric Singers



Deanery / Ecumenical Links

Upper Skerne joined Stockton Deanery in 2017. There is some sense of disconnection with Stockton Deanery arising from a sense that Upper Skerne is quite different from most of the Deanery, which is generally more urban in character. However, we are in the process of establishing closer links within the Deanery with our neighbours in Stockton Country Parish, with whom we recently organised a lent quiet day, which was held in Bishop Middleham Church. This was well attended and there is interest in arranging a return trip to Stockton Country Parish in autumn 2023.

Sedgefield Area Churches Together is a very active group. They meet for ecumenical Taize services, and work together each year for *Carols on the Green* in Sedgefield, and a *Good Friday Walk of Witness* around the churches. In recent years they also ran a *Carols in the Car Park*, during Covid, which was held in Sainsbury's car park; and a *Café Cop*, in collaboration with local environmental organisations, to draw

attention to COP26 in Glasgow.

There are good relations in Trimdon Village between St Mary Magdalene's Church and St William's RC Church, with the two

congregations coming together every year for *Stations of the Cross* and a *Walk of Witness* on Good Friday, and for a service of *Lessons and Carols* on Christmas Eve.



Hopes for the Future

While we are looking to establish firm foundations for future mission and growth, we are also looking for 'easy wins' in this time of transition for the parish. One such win is the establishment of *Food and Faith*, an informal style of service which would be more accessible to

the unchurched and de-churched of our parish. Additionally, we are looking to establish and expand our Youth Network, firstly at St Edmund's then at St Alban's Church with its excellent facilities and its position in the most densely

socially disadvantaged part of the parish.

There is a deep desire to deepen our spiritual life as followers of Christ and grow in confidence to share faith the with others.



Hello

Hello! I am absolutely thrilled that you are considering a post in the Parish of the Upper Skerne. I have been Team Rector here for over a year now, and it has been an absolute privilege to be called to minister in this post. I hope this profile gives you a flavour of our communities, the churches and the wider parish, and of what ministry here might look like. It has been particularly exciting to note how people are hungry for the Gospel, though they may not know it yet. God is certainly doing something at this time; our hope is to remain faithful to Him and proclaim the faith, once and for all given to the saints. Praise Jesus.

--Rev'd David Lucas



The Vicarage

The vicarage is a modern property in the village of Bishop Middleham. It is a 4-bedroom detached house, with a garden, garage, and a study on the ground floor. The floorplan for the house can be found in Appendix 2 on page 22 of the profile.



Appendix 1 Useful Contacts



1.1 The Parish, the post and the Diocese

Enquiries about this post can be directed to the Team Rector of the Parish of the Upper Skerne, The Reverend David Lucas, by emailing: Rev.davidjlucas@gmail.com

Information about our Diocese is available at <https://durhamdiocese.org>

Information about The Parish of the Upper Skerne is available at www.upperskerne.org.uk and on Facebook at [Parish of the Upper Skerne](https://www.facebook.com/ParishoftheUpperSkerne).

1.2 Schools in the Parish

Primary Schools

- St Michael's Primary C of e school, Bishop Middleham <https://www.stmichaelsprimary.durham.sch.uk>
- Fishburn Primary school <https://www.fishburn.durham.sch.uk>
- Hardwick Primary school, Sedgfield <https://sedgfieldhardwick.laidlawschoolstrust.co.uk>
- Rectory Row Primary school, Sedgfield <https://www.sedgfield-pri.durham.sch.uk>

- Deaf Hill Primary School, Trimdon Station <https://www.dhakpf.durham.sch.uk>

- Bluebell Meadow Primary school, trimdon Village <https://www.bluebellmeadowprimary.org.uk>

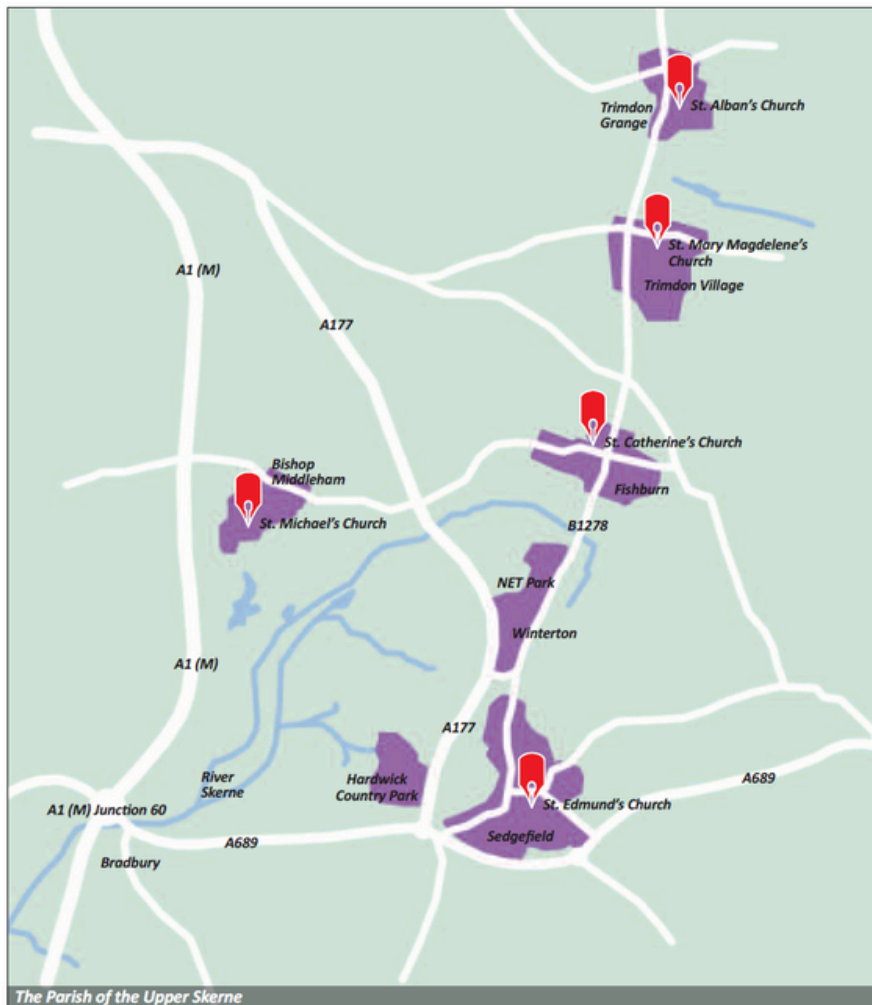
Secondary School

- Sedgfield Community College <https://sedgfield.laidlawschoolstrust.co.uk>



1.3 The Region

The North East is an exciting place to live, learn and be part of God's mission. There is a huge amount to see and discover from heritage centres to outstanding countryside and the action of our cities. Find out more by visiting <https://www.visitnortheastengland.com>



Acknowledgements

Photographs by kind
permission of
Robert Cooper
John Burrows
Kev Stevens

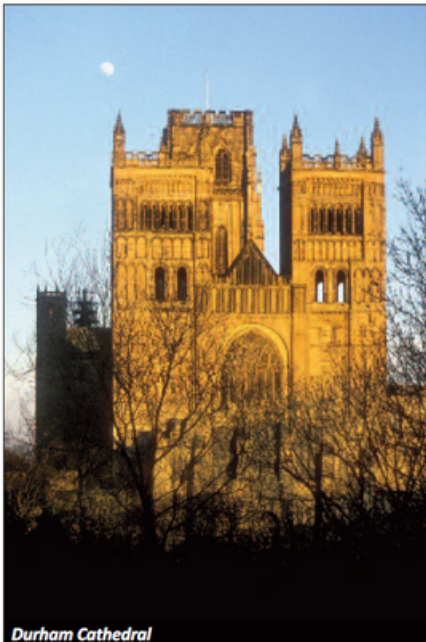
Design and artwork
Kev Stevens
The Art Room North East



St Mary Magdalene's Church, Trimdon



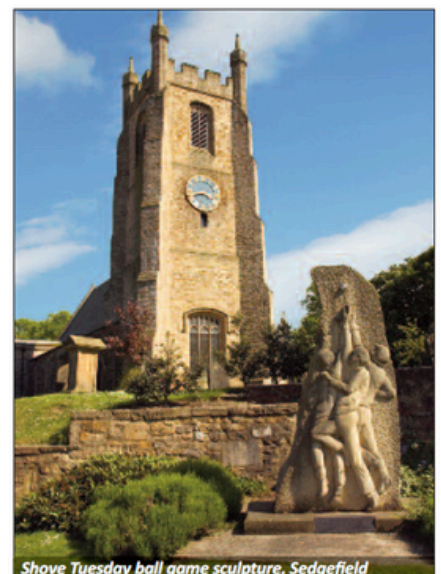
Miners' Banner, St. Alban's Church, Trimdon Grange



Durham Cathedral



The ancient tradition of Sedgefield's Shrove Tuesday ball game



Shrove Tuesday ball game sculpture, Sedgefield



St Mary Magdalene's Church, Trimdon Village



St Mary Magdalene's Church, Trimdon Village



St Catherine's Church, Fishburn



Fishburn Band on Durham Miners' Gala Day



St Catherine's Church, Fishburn



St Edmund's Church, Sedgfield

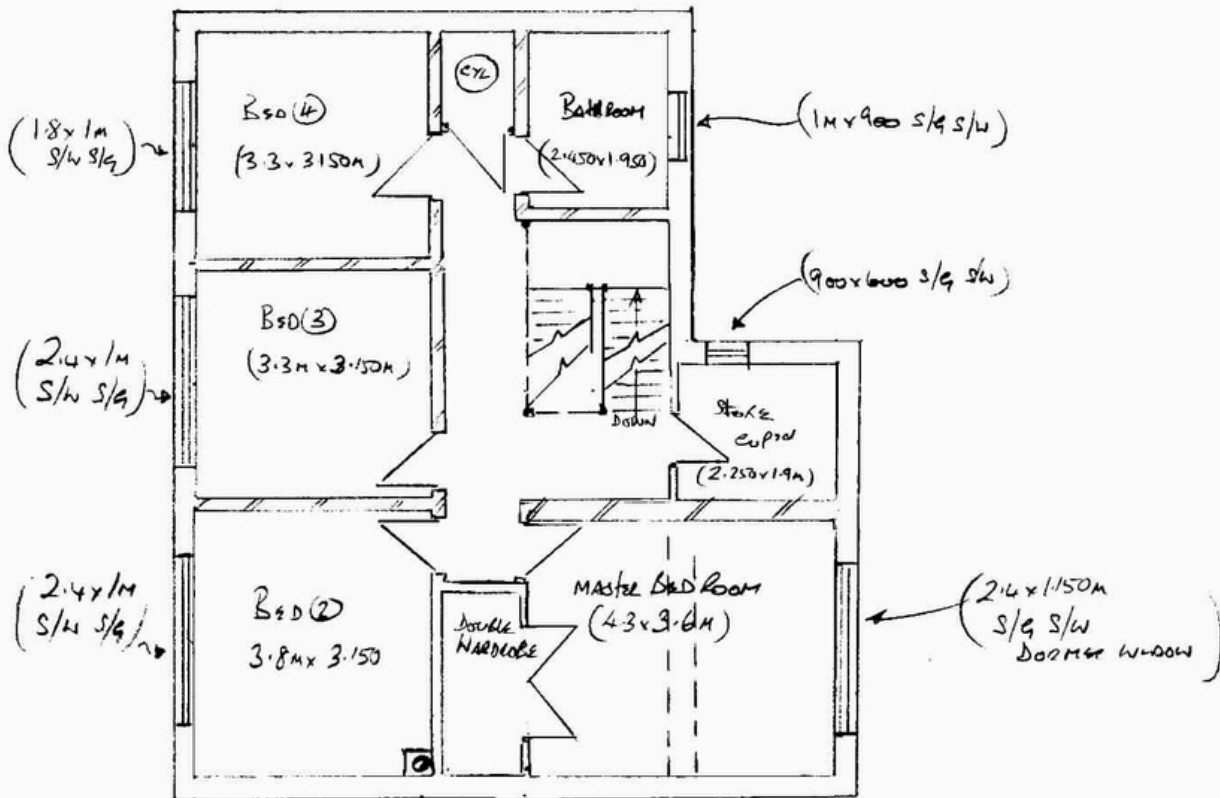
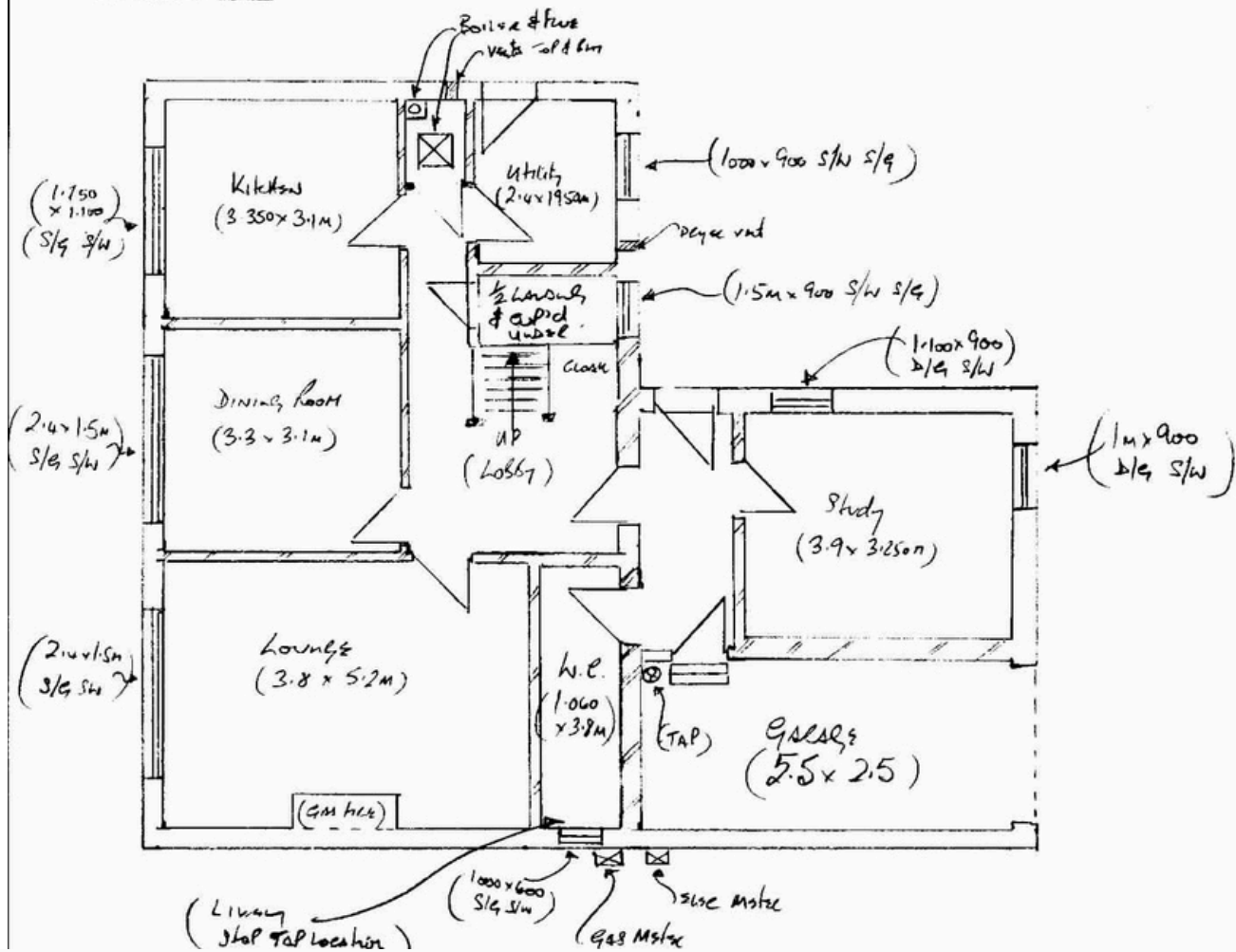


Kingfisher sculpture, Hardwick Country Park



St Edmund's Church, Sedgfield

Appendix 2 Vicarage Floorplan





St Mary Magdalene's Church Trimdon, Bridget Jones window