

## UNITED BENEFICE OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST, BIRKBY AND CHRIST CHURCH, WOODHOUSE, HUDDERSFIELD

Welcome to the parish brochure of St John The Evangelist, Birkby.

### Our Parish



The parish of St. John the Evangelist is situated in the large multi-cultural suburb of Birkby, part of the Greenhead ward of Kirklees Metropolitan Council, a short distance from the town centre of Huddersfield, at the less affluent southern tip of the district. Birkby is a conservation area listed on the Heritage Risk Register (2023) as being in a 'very bad and deteriorating condition'.

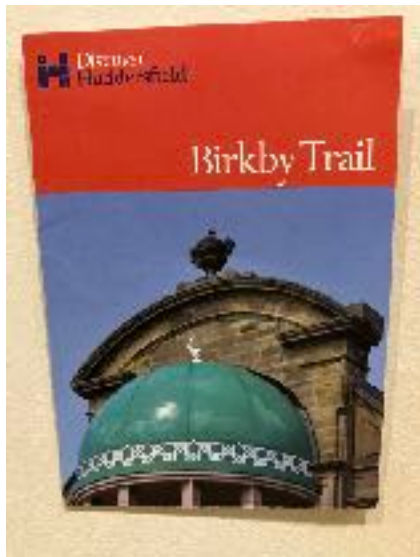
The church holds a dominant position by the main road through Birkby, and is surrounded by a grassed, wooded area which is owned and maintained by the church, open to the public, with potential for cultivating a community garden.



St. John's vicarage (to the left above) is currently occupied by the curate from another church in the deanery and their family.

The parish boundaries extend to Hillhouse and Fartown in the east, Grimescar and Cowcliffe towards the north and Highfields and Edgerton to the west. The area comprises a mix of old and newer housing, owner-occupied, privately rented and some social. There are two relatively new housing estates within a quarter of a mile of the church. The former textile and engineering heritage of the district has been replaced by multi-ethnic retailers and food outlets.

The parish ranks 604 out of 12,239 parishes in the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score. Its diverse population is relatively evenly spaced across all age ranges, with 22.3% of Christian faith and 49.6% of Muslim faith (Church of England Spotlight data 2024). Birkby has the highest number of residents in Kirklees who were born outside the UK, predominantly of South Asian origin. There are several mosques within the parish area in addition to various other interdenominational places of worship, including Vajrapani Buddhist Centre, Sikh Temple, Elim Pentecostal Church and Kingdom Hall.



Masjid Riza & Islamic Centre  
(formerly St John's Parish Centre) in the King  
Cliff area of the parish

### **Community Facilities**

There are several schools and nurseries within the parish: Birkby Infant and Nursery School, Birkby Junior School, Brambles Primary Academy, St Patrick's Catholic Primary Academy, Birkbees Nursery and Pre-School, Little Angels Nursery and Pre-School, The Mount, an independent infant and junior school. Pupils from Birkby Infant and Nursery School, Birkbees Nursery and Pre-School and Brambles Primary Academy visit the church at different times during the year, some to learn about the general artefacts and others to look at the nativity figures and listen to the Christmas Story.

At present there is only one care home in the parish, Beechwood in Bryan Road (several others having closed in recent years), but the church does not have any current contact with the home. There is a large hostel for people who are homeless in Clare Hill. The independent Huddersfield Hospital is situated in Birkby Hall Road, treating some NHS patients in addition to private patients.

Other community facilities within the parish include the Clare Hill Community and Education Centre, Communities Together (a not-for-profit Social Enterprise supporting the local community, in particular but not exclusively those of South Asian heritage), and the Rose Hill Natural Burial Ground. A significant recent development is the new government Asylum Centre opened just outside the Greenhead ward with the aim of accommodating up to 670 asylum seekers.

## The Vicar We Need

We seek a priest who is outgoing, warm, energetic, open-minded and tolerant, able to relate easily to the diversity of the Church and its wider community.

We seek someone who will:

- be committed to the rich Eucharistic and liturgical life of the congregation, while developing new worship initiatives to encourage people to connect and grow in faith
- be both a spiritual and pastoral leader to help us grow in faith
- develop our spirituality and the understanding of our faith in clear and easily accessible terms
- minister to the needs of various age groups in our congregation
- be a good communicator who can reach the wide variety of nationalities who worship with us
- increase our outreach towards the disadvantaged and needy, in particular with regard to asylum seekers
- relate to children and young people on their own terms, to develop their sense of belonging to a community of faith
- be an active and visible presence in the community leading, growing and facilitating good community partnerships
- motivate and develop a mission-shaped community of faith
- have hope and optimism who is prepared to lead a community in development and growth
- be a person with the organisational skills to oversee and lead funding applications related to significant building restoration and community outreach
- grow interfaith links especially with regard to local Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist and Hindu communities
- build-up and grow links with regard to young people especially through work with schools
- grow a vision for the ministry of the Benefice of St John The Evangelist and Christ Church.



A memorial in the church grounds to eight members of the same family killed by arson in a fire at their home a short distance up the road from St John's. Interdenominational memorial services were held in the church involving members of our clergy and congregation.

## **Our Church**

St John's offers all those who come here a unique space:

where they can experience God in a congregation through the best of Anglican liturgy, organ and hymns,

where they can experience God in a sacred space with prayer, word, bread and wine,

where they can feel welcomed, build friendships and share hospitality,

where individuals and communities can mark the special moments in their life with depth and dignity.

## **Our People**

We currently have two churchwardens, a treasurer and a secretary. We have recently been fortunate to gain the support of a Lay Reader (licensed to the Arch Deacon).

Our multi-ethnic congregation (Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, White British), is relatively small, averaging a total of approximately 25-30 persons at Sunday morning services (including children). Ages and gender are mixed, with some older, retired persons, some working people and some younger families with children.



Members of the congregation including some PCC members

## Our Services

There are currently 2 regular weekly services: Sunday Eucharist (sung) at 09.15 (accompanied by pipe organ) and mid-week Holy Communion (said) on Wednesday, 10.00. Prior to the pandemic, a Benefice Service used to be held on the 5th Sunday of the month at 10.45 (followed by a 'faith lunch'), alternating between St John's and Christ Church. We intend to resume these services in the near future. Seasonal services such as those during Holy Week, Midnight Mass, Harvest are held, plus funerals, memorials and baptisms. Before Christmas, either a Nativity play or Christingle Service takes place, involving children and young people. A Confirmation service was held in October 2023 when 13 children / young people associated with St John's and 1 adult from Christ Church were confirmed.

The Sunday school, traditionally held on Sunday mornings alongside the Eucharist Service, now needs to take fuller account of the whole age range of children and young people coming to church, including those who are recently confirmed, in terms of resources and activities. We are also considering what youth links might be possible with other local churches.

The regular service style is traditional, 'middle of the road', based on the Common Worship Book, with hymns from the New English Hymnal. Robes and full vestments appropriate to the church season are worn at all services.

## Our Church and the Community

As mentioned above, children from some of the local pre-school, infants and primary schools visit the church at different times during the year for educational purposes, an experience which could be offered more widely.

A church **Coffee Morning**, open to all, is held on the 3rd Saturday of the month, providing regular fund-raising support. Prior to the pandemic, various other fund-raising events took place across each year. It has proved difficult to regain momentum over the past 18 months but we intend to reconvene our Social Committee in the near future.



Coffee morning visitors and helpers

**Aspire Creating Communities** is a network of community groups across Kirklees aiming to combat social isolation and loneliness experienced by older people which began at St John's in 2015 as our community project, enabling us to secure Heritage Lottery funding for restoration work. The St. John's group continues to meet weekly in the community room, offering a range of activities, including for example, crafts, speakers, exercise, music and inter-generational engagement. An Aspire group is also established at Birkby Croft, a sheltered housing complex within the parish.



St John's Aspire members



Other groups regularly using the community room include the 'Bread of Life' soup kitchen, a 'members only' Craft group, and a Whist group. From November to the end of March for the past 2 years we have hosted a weekly 'Warm Hub' in the community room, offering a safe, warm space with light refreshments free of charge, social companionship and signposting to local services as appropriate.



'Warm Hub' over the winter months

A well-attended community lunch was held in May 2023 to celebrate the coronation of King Charles III. St John's participates in the annual Heritage Open Days which take place in September and include organ recitals given by local organists; St John's is also the starting point on the Birkby Heritage Trail. The church acts as a 'Polling Station' on local and national Election days. In recent years, we have received help from the Community Pay-Back team to maintain the church grounds.



We support a number of charities including Christian Aid, the Children's Society, MacMillan Cancer Support, the Christian Africa Relief Trust and the Church Homeless Trust. We also collect for the Huddersfield Welcome Centre Food Bank.

## Our Building and Resources

St John The Evangelist, grade II\* listed, was built by Joseph Kaye between 1851 and 1853 to the designs of architect William Butterfield in early decorated, Gothic revival style. The church was paid for by Sir John William Ramsden whose family owned the manor of Huddersfield at that time. The church is renowned for its stained glass, the three West windows, executed by William Morris (London), depict the 'Te Deum' in various forms, and the Great East window, executed by Powell & Sons (London), is a memorial to the fallen of World War I.



East Window



Part of the West Window



Lady Chapel Window



The 3 manual Conacher pipe organ, supporting a tradition of fine musicianship at St John's, was rebuilt by Wood of Huddersfield in 1986.

The rear of the church's interior was converted into a 'parish room' (now referred to as 'the community room') in the early 1980's, which is used for meetings, fundraising and social events plus external lettings. There are kitchen facilities plus disability access and toilet facilities.



## **Restoration Work**

In 2008, the top section of the spire was toppled through the roof of the church by would-be metal thieves, causing major damage. The spire and related damage was fully repaired under insurance, but partial collapse of the East window in 2011 prompted a 5-phase restoration programme, involving the tower and other roof sections, with English Heritage and then Heritage Lottery funding support. 3 phases have been completed: the East window and wall, the outer North roof, plus the outer and inner South roof. Some urgent work was done to the tower to stop water ingress in 2021. Phase 4 which covers the chancel roof (most urgently required), remaining work to the tower, inner North roof and repair of the West window plus phase 5, the internal reordering of the church, remain outstanding. A community project (partly drafted) is required to obtain further National Lottery Heritage funding, alongside other forms of fundraising, to complete the renovation and reordering work.

## **Our Challenges / Potential for Development**

- Review of Sunday Service time - the current time of 9.15am is deemed too early for young families and leaves no time for the vicar to interact with the congregation as he/she is rushing off to provide the service at our sister church. We would like to explore how other benefices in a similar situation may have addressed this issue.
- Building the congregation, through outreach (including possibly greater involvement with schools/nurseries) and greater pastoral work, different service times, adding in different forms of service. We recognise that the future is now and we have to be open to changes that make growth more likely by adding in elements of greater modernity without losing the sense of tradition and heritage of the church, focusing on faith, spirituality and service and also being mindful of the need to maintain financial stability.
- Supporting the transition of our recently confirmed young people towards taking a greater part in the life of the church, which may include considering ways of linking with other local churches for youth activities, and in the meantime, making 'Sunday School' content more age-relevant with some integration as appropriate with the Sunday morning service.
- Regaining greater lay inclusion in services and in the life of the church (including verger responsibilities) which would hopefully come from building the congregation.
- Strengthening community and interdenominational connections and developing the plan for our community project to enable us to obtain Heritage Lottery funding (alongside our own fundraising efforts) to continue essential restoration work and eventual reordering of the church interior to secure the longer-term future of the church as a sacred place of worship **and** venue for wider community use.

## **What we offer to our new vicar**

- A warm welcome
- Full personal support
- Commitment and dedication

## **Appendix 1 OUR FINANCES**

**Please see separate document for St John's Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31st December 2023.**