



St Mary
West Bank

PARISH PROFILE

The Benefice of South Widnes:

St Mary Hale with Halebank

St Mary West Bank

INTRODUCTION

This is a fantastic opportunity for a Spirit-filled, mission-minded leader to invest in two very different church communities, as together we embark on a crucial season of discernment and mission in our parishes. We are asking God to send someone who will enrich the good work already going on, challenge us as we dig deeper into mission and ministry, and help us to discern what a bigger church making a bigger difference might mean for us in the next season

In 2024, the Deanery will explore its engagement with Fit for Mission, a transformational change project funded by Church Commissioners. Pastoral reorganisation afforded by FfM would result in a single larger parish, with shared resource and greater collaboration, releasing parishes from much of the administrative burden and freeing clergy and laity to focus on mission.

St Mary's Hale with Halebank is a multi-generational church which is thriving and growing, both spiritually and numerically. The church is 'punching above its weight' in terms of attendance and finances (relative to other churches in the diocese), but we are not resting on our laurels.

We have strong relationships with our two primary schools and the wider local community. While the church is an integral part of village life, we long to see God moving beyond the walls of our building out into our community and beyond.

We are a friendly congregation and function well as a church, with a talented PCC, two church wardens, treasurer, two lay readers, a retired vicar, and a committed team of volunteers. However, we need a priest who will lead and inspire us to deepen our faith as individuals, teach the Word, and help us share the good news with our community.

Although this is an interim post, we don't want a caretaker; we want a visionary leader to work alongside and inspire a team of people who love Jesus and want to see **more people knowing Him and making Him known.**

St Mary's West Bank is a 'major church of huge historical significance', set in the centre of a small isolated community in the south of Widnes. Although we are few in number we are a welcoming community, strong in faith, mission and fellowship.

We are very aware that most people learn of God's love for them when they see it in practice.

The demands of our building are huge, as are the needs of our parish, an area of very high economic and social deprivation. We meet some with thriving Boys Brigade (plus band), Rainbow, Brownie, Guide and Ranger units. There are many more: the children in school, the elderly, vulnerable and lonely that we would like to reach out to and demonstrate God's love in action on West Bank. We just don't have the capacity financially or people wise at the moment to do this.

Like the crowd in Matthew 9, we are looking for someone to come and be our shepherd, to guide us through this challenging period, and assist in finding more labourers to gather the plentiful harvest.

THE ROLE

Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” Matthew 9:37-38 NIV

You will be responsible for leading two churches which serve three distinct communities, encompassing a diverse social and economic spectrum. We believe that “the harvest is plentiful” in each community and are praying for someone who will lead us in our mission of growth.

VISION

Inspiring individuals to develop a true “Kingdom” mentality which transcends personal expressions of worship. Helping to define the vision and mission of each church so that all members can understand, embrace and contribute towards it.

LEADERSHIP

Demonstrating godly wisdom and leadership within the context of the unique needs of each church and community. Recognising and developing the growth potential that already exists in the churches, and developing leaders. Addressing the missing age groups: secondary through university age. Navigating and leading both churches through the ‘Fit for Mission’ process.

TEACHING

Prioritising the Word of God and teaching it with boldness, encouraging people to study the Bible and apply it in their daily lives. Teaching biblical financial stewardship and principles of giving.

DISCIPLESHIP

Encouraging God’s people to grow in their relationship with God and to become true disciples of Jesus.

THE ROLE

ST MARY HALE WITH HALEBANK

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” 2 Timothy 3:16 NKJV

St Mary Hale with Halebank serves two communities in Hale and Halebank. Our mission is to “enable all to develop a lively faith in Jesus”.

The church functions well on its own but we are not content with “doing church”. We want to grow in our walk with God and reach more people, but it will require true visionary leadership and Bible teaching for our church to flourish.

We have reached an exciting time in our growth journey with an increasing number of children and young families joining the church. However, this has created its own challenges due to their preference for engaging contemporary worship conflicting with those who wish to maintain traditional forms of worship. The congregation has adapted well to this challenge, but strategic leadership is required to ensure continued growth across both styles of worship.

The role will involve working with both groups of people, understanding their needs and celebrating the value of each worship style, while exploring ways of continuing towards our common goal of making disciples who make disciples.

EQUIPPING GOD'S PEOPLE

Above all, you will be a Spirit-filled leader who is passionate about growing disciples of Jesus and reaching the unchurched with the Good News.

You will be supported by an established team of passionate, bible-believing Christians who desire to see more people knowing Jesus, becoming disciples, and sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with their family, friends and community.

You will be someone who considers and accepts the Bible as the inspired, inerrant and authoritative Word of God; a strong leader who is committed to prayer and seeking the will of God in all things through the leading of the Holy Spirit; and dedicated to helping people become disciples who make disciples.

You will be comfortable leading worship in both traditional and contemporary worship styles, valuing each with equal importance. Your resilient, yet calm and reassuring presence will bring comfort to members of the congregation and PCC as the Deanery considers and navigates the Fit for Mission process.

You recognise the importance of investing in families, children and young people and training all believers for the work of the ministry.

THE PERSON

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” Ephesians 4:11-12 NIV

Essential

Desirable

Theological

Seeks first the kingdom and His righteousness with a commitment to see the people and places of Hale, Halebank and West Bank transformed. Broad theological understanding, willing to release the ministry of the whole people of God in a mixed ecology of church.

Experience of serving church communities with a variety of ecclesial traditions.

Spiritual & Personal Qualities

Mature and generous faith in Jesus nourished by prayer, scripture and worship. Team player who works with others to find wisdom, resilience, and ways to overcome challenges.

Calm, reassuring presence in the midst of change with experience of handling disputes and conflict with grace, sensitivity and firmness.

Vision & Leadership

Proven relational leader who engages with people and builds trust with clear communication. Able and willing to challenge personal resistance with sensitivity and in an encouraging way, and able to inspire people to see the bigger picture. An enabler who can identify God-given gifts and loves to release people into their calling. Committed to growing teams and leaders.

Has worked in a team context, and has led teams. Understanding of rural and inner city church settings and able to lead projects.

Knowledge & Skills

Prioritises the important in a tempest of urgent demands. Devolves responsibility, and delegates tasks whilst maintaining accountability. Is aware of financial issues and procedures. Has a strong understanding of safeguarding.

Has experience of coordinating the management of people, resources and buildings.



THE BENEFICE AND THE PARISHES

The Benefice of South Widnes consists of two parishes: **St Mary Hale with Halebank** and **St Mary West Bank**. Both parishes are situated in the borough of Halton.

Of the 316 local authorities in England, Halton is ranked 31st most income-deprived. The borough ranked in the bottom 20 percent of local authority areas in England for health in 2021. There is significant income disparity between the 79 neighbourhoods within the borough and within the parishes themselves.

HALE WITH HALEBANK

The Parish is made up of two separate villages which are separated by a green belt and have a combined population of around 3,750. Recent planning approval has been granted for 500 new homes in Halebank which will increase this number to nearer 5,000. St Mary's Church is located in Hale Village.

The villages are socially and economically distinct. Although situated in the borough of Halton, Hale is more closely affiliated with Liverpool. Halebank has stronger historical and geographical links with Widnes.

The majority of our congregation lives in Hale but a small number of people from Halebank and surrounding areas attend the church. We are committed to the challenge of meeting the needs of the community of Halebank through various other opportunities and have established a work there (B.I.G.).

THE CONTEXT

HALE

Hale is a semi-rural, leafy suburb sitting on the banks of the River Mersey. It is situated 2 miles south of Liverpool John Lennon Airport and 3 miles from Widnes. The village has a rich history that dates back centuries and is mentioned in the Domesday Book. It is home to around 1,800 people of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds, and typical household income is above the national average. Most homes are privately owned.

There is a mixture of housing stock within the village ranging from 15th century thatched cottages and 19th century farmhouses to modern family homes and a very small number of former council properties. The church dates back to the 11th century but was largely rebuilt and modernised in 1980 after a fire destroyed the building.

Hale is known for its picturesque setting, historic landmarks, and community spirit. It has become a place that attracts residents and visitors alike, offering a blend of historical charm and modern amenities which include a modern village hall, a further community hall, several local shops and two pubs, one of which is named after the “Childe of Hale”.

There are good links between the church and the community.

THE CONTEXT

There is one local primary school (Church of England) which is over-subscribed. The school accommodates around 185 children.

Our previous two incumbents and foundation governors have worked hard to foster strong links with the school and this remains an open door for mission and evangelism.

These links have been a source of growth for the church in recent years, with several parents coming to Christ and becoming active members of the church. The school actively promotes the church and encourages church attendance. We see school ministry as being **essential** to growing the church and reaching the wider community.

We currently have one foundation governor in the school.

SCHOOL WORSHIP

Previous incumbents and foundation governors have gone into the school weekly, holding short and engaging children's worship, including leading songs, telling bible stories and praying for the school and its children.

The current headteacher has expressed a desire to build even stronger links and we are currently exploring how we can maximise this further growth opportunity.

HALE C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL



www.hale.halton.sch.uk



HALEBANK

Halebank is a village in the western part of Widnes and approximately 1 mile from Hale. Halebank has an industrial heritage and is home to around 1,900 people of all ages and mixed socio-economic backgrounds.

In January 2024, planning approval was given for a large new housing scheme for up to 500 new homes. The scheme includes a new primary school with two-form entry, a new local centre, and elderly accommodation. The scheme is likely to increase the Halebank population by almost 60%.

Approximately 61% of children currently attending school in Halebank are eligible for free school meals.

A team of volunteers from St Mary's Hale meets weekly in Halebank Youth Centre for B.I.G. (Believe in God) to build relationships, support and pray with people from the village with the ultimate aim of establishing a new Worshipping Community there. Around 25 people (plus volunteers) attend each week.

There is a former Methodist Church in the village, which is now home to an Elim Pentecostal Church.

THE CONTEXT



HALEBANK C of E PRIMARY SCHOOL

www.halebank.halton.sch.uk



There is one local primary school (Church of England) which accommodates approximately 100 pupils. Links with the school were good in the past but were eroded due to the Covid lockdowns and subsequent changes of school leadership.

We have one foundation governor in the school and are actively exploring ways to rebuild what was lost.



THE CHURCH AND ITS PEOPLE

THE CHURCH

Our congregation is made up of people of all ages and from different social and economic backgrounds. The congregation are predominantly white British, which reflects the demographic of the community, although we are delighted that both the church and community are slowly becoming more diverse. Most of the congregation are of working age whilst around 40% are retired.

There are currently just over 100 people on the electoral roll, of which around 60-70 people attend Sunday morning services weekly.

The congregation are kind and loving, welcoming, hospitable and generous, serving God in the church and in the community with their time and finances. Members pray and care for each other, providing practical support when the need arises. Regular fundraising events are held by individual members and groups to support charities such as Leprosy Mission, Christian Aid, The Children's Society and Water Aid. The church collects and delivers food and toiletries to Widnes Food Bank.

"Lovely church. Lovely people."



THE CHURCH AND ITS PEOPLE



THE CHURCH

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” Matthew 28:19 NIV

OUR PRIORITIES FOR MISSION

Our four main priorities at this time are:

DISCIPLESHIP

(deepening discipleship) – We fully recognise that effective mission begins with strong disciples.

EVANGELISM

(introducing people to Jesus) – We believe that every church service and community event is an opportunity to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and leading people into a relationship with Him.

SERVICE

(more justice in the world) – We have found that one of the best ways of discipling people is by working alongside them in service, demonstrating the love of God to others.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

(younger and more diverse) – It is no secret that most practicing adult Christians first heard about Jesus in their childhood. We want to build on our successful children’s work in the church and community. Also reaching parents and grandparents through children’s work.

THE CHURCH

SERVICES

The church hosts a variety of services which aim to meet the needs of people of all ages and preferred worship style.

Prior to the interregnum we had two services each Sunday (a traditional service at 9:30am followed by an All-Age service at 11am) and Morning Prayer each Wednesday at 9:30am. Traditional services averaged around 20 people and the all-age services averaged around 50, including children.

The congregation were keen to retain both styles of worship during the interregnum, but without a vicar we could not maintain so many services. Currently, we hold a single combined Sunday service, alternating weekly between traditional and all-age styles of worship.

During this time the congregation has grown in unity and most continue to attend weekly, coming together as “one body” learning to understand each other’s needs and preferences.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Psalm 133:1 KJV

SERVICE SCHEDULE

"I really sensed the presence of God."

THE CHURCH

Something for everyone

TRADITIONAL WORSHIP (10AM FIRST AND THIRD SUNDAYS)

Two Lay Readers assist in leading worship and preaching along with a retired priest. Services include Common Worship, Holy Communion, occasional BCP services and Family Communion.

ALL-AGE WORSHIP (10AM FIRST AND THIRD SUNDAYS)

All-Age services embrace a contemporary expression of worship using multimedia and modern worship songs. Services are led by a team of lay people and children are regularly encouraged to take part in these services.

MIDWEEK WORSHIP (9:30AM EVERY WEDNESDAY)

Morning Prayer on Wednesday mornings is led by our Lay Readers. Services alternate between Common Worship and BCP.

FIFTH SUNDAYS

On fifth Sundays the whole church joins together for a 'Songs of Praise' celebration service where members select and introduce their favourite songs and share testimonies.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

THE CHURCH

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’” Matthew 19:14 NIV UK

Children and young people are a vital part of our church family, and, like Jesus, we value them just the same as any adult member. We actively engage children by having them take part in all-age services by singing, doing bible readings, acting out roles in bible stories and operating sound and video equipment.

We have been presented with the ‘Child Friendly Church’ award several times and are in the enviable position of having a healthy and growing number of young families attending church, with approximately 15-20 children aged 1-11 attending Sunday services each week.

Prior to the interregnum, children attended their own Sunday School which they named ‘Vibles’. This was run by a team of volunteers and was very successful. Since combining the services, the limitations of the church building have so far prevented us from maximising the impact of Vibles and this is something we are currently addressing.

Many of our children are approaching secondary school age. We recognise the need to urgently make provision for this group and are actively exploring how we can do this in a way that is culturally relevant and meaningful.

THE CHURCH

“When they arrived, they went to the upstairs room of the house where they were staying...They all met together and were constantly united in prayer”

Acts 1:13-14 NLT

DISCIPLESHIP

DISCOVERY GROUPS

There are 5 Discovery Groups (home groups) operating within the church. Around 50% of the congregation are part of a Discovery Group, which is the primary source of nurturing and discipleship within the church. We see discipleship as essential to the spiritual and numerical growth of our church and want to invest more time and effort in this resource.

NEW BELIEVERS AND NON-BELIEVERS

Courses are held throughout the year for people with no faith and those wanting to develop their faith and knowledge of God and the Bible. We have held several courses including Alpha and ‘Start!’, as well as Advent courses. These are vital opportunities to lead people along their journey of faith.

THE UPPER ROOM

One of our Discovery Groups is made up of parents who have two things in common: young families and a deep hunger for God and His Word. The group shares a strong desire for Spirit-led worship and now meets in the church bi-weekly on Sunday evenings to worship God through song, bible study, prayer and discussion, without the constraints of more formal worship services. This group also leads our All-Age services.

Our hope is that this will eventually become a weekly service in its own right.

REGULAR ACTIVITIES IN THE PARISH

MORNING PRAYERS

Everything we do as a church is rooted and grounded in prayer.

A small group meets each weekday morning via Zoom to pray for the church and its people.

MESSY CHURCH

Messy Church takes place around 4 times a year and is attended by around 50 children (plus parents) from the church, local school and wider community. This is an exciting opportunity to expose children and parents to the love of God and sow seeds in those who might not ordinarily attend church.

LIGHTHOUSE TOTS

Lighthouse Tots meets every Thursday during term time. Around 12 parents/grandparents and toddlers from the village and neighbouring communities attend each week to play, sing Christian songs and listen to bible stories.

TIME 4 TEA

Each Sunday during the summer a team of volunteers opens the church to serve tea, coffee and homemade cakes to local people and visitors to Hale. As well as a warm welcome and refreshments, we offer a quiet place for reflection and prayer, and someone to talk to if wished.

COMMUNITY PAYBACK

Teams from Community Payback attend every Friday to take care of the churchyard and graveyard.

HOME VISITS

Home visits are arranged for the sick and housebound and communion is provided when requested.

DISCOVERY GROUPS

We currently have 5 Discovery Groups operating out of homes in Hale and Halebank.

B.I.G. COFFEE MORNING

B.I.G. (Believe in God) takes place every Wednesday morning. A committed team of church volunteers provide a cup of coffee (or tea!) and listening ear, building bridges into the Halebank Community.

ASTRA ZENECA

As part of its ESG commitment, working parties from Astra Zeneca attend around twice a year to help maintain the church grounds. They are generous with their time and have made a huge impact with their work.

"We were made so welcome and invited in to the weekly coffee morning."

THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY

We have excellent links to the local community through the school and members' involvement in various community groups, as well as events such as concerts with the Rossendale Brass Band and Merseywave Choir, quiz nights and community lunches. Regular community-focused church services include Memorial Services, an Easter 'Walk of Witness', an annual Civic Service, Christmas Carol Service, Crib Service, Christingle and school leavers' services.

Ecumenical services are held during the year with Father Ed Bain from St Ambrose and St Christopher's Church in nearby Speke. Services take place on Good Friday, Remembrance Day and at the Christmas Carol Service. These services are further opportunities for evangelism, building connections within the community and connecting with our brothers and sisters-in-Christ from other denominations.

WEDDINGS, BAPTISMS AND FUNERALS

In 2023, the church held 3 weddings, 16 infant baptisms and 10 funerals. In addition, there were 8 burials of ashes.

THE CHURCH AND THE COMMUNITY



Good Friday Walk of Witness / placing a wooden cross at the centre of the Hale Village



Crib Service December 2023 with over 130 adults plus 90 children from the community.



'Believe In God' coffee morning in Halebank



Lighthouse Tots



Above: Lent Lunches

Right: Church opening for Time4Tea



Community and church volunteers helping to clear the Churchyard



Remembrance Day service at Hale Village War Memorial

THE CHURCH

"It's helped me get through difficult times."

B.I.G. IN HALEBANK

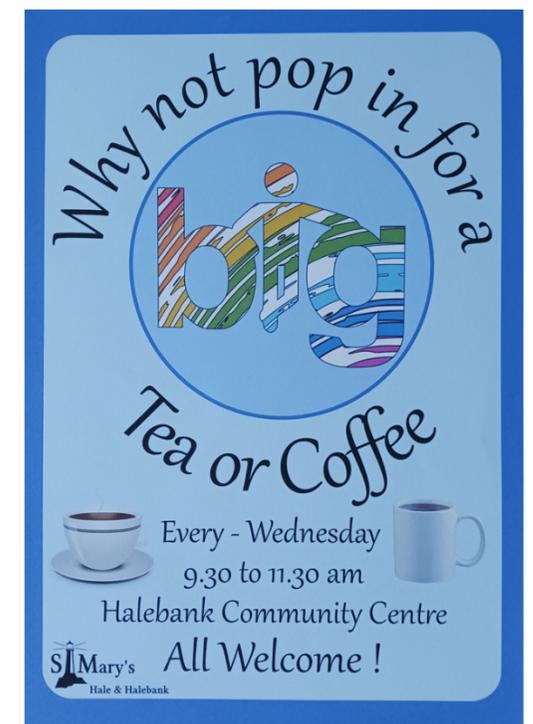
The church has no formal presence in Halebank, but the needs in the community are great. In 2021, a small team met to discuss how we could engage with this community and decided that a weekly coffee morning would be the best way to build relationships and trust. The name B.I.G. (Believe In God) was chosen.

The group has been meeting for just over 2 years each Wednesday at Halebank Youth Centre and now has regular contact with over 70 people. The team has built strong relationships with members of the community and approximately 25 people attend each week, plus around 5 volunteers from the church. Several people from the Halebank community have become active members of St Mary's Church in the past 2 years and this is contributing to the growth of the church.

Aims:

- Regular prayerful lunches – a time of short prayer and reflection
- Celebration of Christian Events
- Prayers for individuals
- Building friendship and support networks
- Formation of local Discovery Group
- Visits/phone calls to sick and needy

This is an exciting and dynamic self-funded initiative with the potential for amazing growth!



THE CHURCH BUILDING

THE CHURCH

The church building is a Grade II* listed building situated in Hale Village; although there has been a church building on the site since 1081, the last building was badly damaged by fire in 1977 and consequently restored in 1980. We now have a warm, bright, light building which is well maintained. Our wardens keep up to date with all tasks on the Quinquennial survey.

The physical limitations of the building and lack of a church hall currently prevent us from providing separate worship space for the children and we have had to adapt our services to accommodate children. However, we are actively looking at ways in which we can adapt the building to make it fit for purpose and to expand our children's work further, to include making provision for older children (secondary age) and youth.

In 2021 we invested in an upgraded PA system which is capable of producing high quality sound and visual presentations. The system is scalable and we will continue to develop the system to meet the needs of the church. There is a loop system for hearing aid wearers.



THE WIDER CONTEXT

WIDNES DEANERY

There are eight churches within the Deanery:

East Widnes Team:	St Luke's (with Cronton), St Ambrose
South Widnes Benefice:	St Mary's Hale (with Halebank), St Mary's Widnes (West Bank)
West Widnes:	St Basil and All Saints, St. Michael and St Thomas
Transform Widnes:	St John's and St Paul's

The Deanery has been unable to meet its parish share in recent years, which has resulted in a reduction in the number of clergy. At the time of writing there are 3 active clergy across the Deanery following two clergy retiring and one moving to another Deanery. The current plan is for there to be 5 clergy (including this vacancy). The Deanery is in the early stages of exploring its involvement in 'Fit for Mission'.

St Mary's Hale with Halebank is one of the larger and more secure churches in the Deanery, both in terms of growth and financial stability. We continue to meet our parish share in full, and our hope is that in time we will be able to support other churches.

THE WIDER CONTEXT

FIT FOR MISSION

The Diocese of Liverpool has recognised that over 70% of its churches are in sustained decline and facing the reality of current issues like a lack of diversity in our congregations, a considerable admin burden, and some unsuitable and unsustainable church buildings. The same is true of Widnes Deanery.

‘Fit for Mission’ is a transformational change project funded by Church Commissioners. Pastoral reorganisation afforded by FfM would result in a single larger parish, with shared resource and greater collaboration. This would release parishes from much of the administrative burden, freeing clergy and laity to focus on mission, with a particular focus on four priorities:

- Introducing people to Jesus
- Deepening Discipleship
- Developing Christian Leaders
- Working for justice

The successful candidate will be expected to engage with the discernment phase with colleagues in the Deanery, and to lead the congregations in this process.

ST MARY HALE WITH HALEBANK

Church Finances

St Mary's Hale with Halebank is financially healthy and stable. Most members give through the parish giving scheme and our expenses are met entirely through regular giving. Our accounts are fully maintained and up to date.

Parish share is fully paid and we have money in reserve. The PCC are currently discussing how best to use that money to further the mission of the church. It has been proposed that the money is used to make changes to the interior space of the church building to make it fit for purpose and provide a more usable space for children's and youth work and other activities.

Parochial Church Council

St Mary's Hale with Halebank benefits from having a PCC which is made up of people of all ages and working backgrounds. Members are unified and decisions are made quickly and efficiently. A third of the members of the PCC are of working age.

There are no outstanding issues or skeletons in the closet for a new incumbent to have to deal with!

THE
WIDER
CONTEXT

ST MARY HALE WITH HALEBANK

Shared Ministry Team

There is a Shared Ministry Team, which shares responsibility to develop and facilitate plans for pastoral care, mission and outreach in the whole parish. The new incumbent would be part of this team. The Shared Ministry Team has been successful in planning and overseeing ventures over the years that have brought in many new people to faith and made families an active part of planning and enjoying worship.

Leading your Church into Growth (LyCiG)

Our previous incumbent and small team from both churches attended a residential LyCiG course in 2021 and follow-up sessions which took place throughout 2022. We have created a follow-up group which meets every other month to strategise and ensure that the principles learnt are implemented, and that the church maintains a strong focus on evangelism and discipleship in all its activities.

Support

We want our Vicar to feel supported, encouraged and refreshed. We expect you to take proper holidays and days off. We encourage time for studying and refreshing. Reasonable expenses are paid.

**THE
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ST MARY HALE WITH HALEBANK

Organist, Verger and Bell Ringers

Our organist plays at traditional Sunday services; other services are accompanied by video and other technology.

There is a verger who serves at funerals and weddings.

A team of bell ringers led by our bell tower captain ring for Sunday services and for weddings as requested: there is a peal of 8 bells in the tower.

For more information:

www.saintmaryshale.com

www.achurchnearyou.com/church/15301/



THE
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HOME

There is a spacious four bedroomed Vicarage in Vicarage Close, Hale. The Vicarage is surrounded by large private gardens bordered by shrubs and mature trees, which provide a peaceful and tranquil environment in which to rest and recharge.

Downstairs there is a large lounge and dining room, both with patio doors to the garden, kitchen, study with closed circuit television, downstairs cloakroom and w.c. Upstairs there are four bedrooms, walk-in linen cupboard and a family bathroom. There is an integrated garage, former coal house and an outdoor shed.

There are several quiet and picturesque walks within a stone's throw of the vicarage where it is possible to enjoy strolls through the countryside experiencing a host of wild birds including pheasants, grouse, and birds of prey.

The vicarage is located in the centre of the village, with Manchester and Liverpool each being a 30 minute car journey away. Liverpool John Lennon Airport is a 5 minute drive from the vicarage - handy for a cheeky getaway!



ST MARY WEST BANK



THE CONTEXT

The Church of St Mary stands at the heart of West Bank overlooking the River Mersey, possibly the nearest church to the river along its entire length. Situated between the Silver Jubilee Road Bridge (1961) and the Mersey Gateway Crossing (2017), the church is a feature along the Trans-Pennine Trail. Completed in 1910 as the parish church for Widnes, St Mary's was nicknamed the "Little Cathedral of Lancashire".

West Bank is located in the south of Widnes, formally known as Woodend, and is served by buses to Runcorn, Liverpool, Warrington and other parts of Widnes. The area is home to approximately 1850 residents.

There are old and new houses with a mix of pensioners, mature and young couples, and single-parent families. Local census figures show that 95% of the population is white.

According to government figures, West Bank is one of the country's top ten areas of highest deprivation. Like all areas it has problems, vandalism, drugs and alcohol abuse, but it is, on the whole, a small friendly community that openly welcomes new people to the area.

THE CONTEXT

A BRIEF HISTORY

The current church was built to replace the original church of St Mary (known as the Widnes Dock Church), which opened in 1858. The old St Marys was built on unsuitable chemical waste ground and eventually sold for just £35. The site is now a grassed area between Church Street and Lower Church Street. The foundation stone of the new St Mary's was laid on 14th May 1908, and the church opened on 12th November 1910. The architects were Austin & Paley of Lancaster. Widnes St Mary's has a listed building 2* rating (ID no. 1130420).

West Bank is famous for starting the chemical revolution in the North of England. A statue of Dr Hutchinson, a founder of the chemical industry, stands in the promenade gardens overlooked by the church. West Bank is also the home of the Catalyst Museum, which depicts the history of the chemical revolution and the part played by Widnes and West Bank. It is located at the entrance to Spike Island, which was the land occupied by many chemical factories and is now a lovely nature reserve and marina.



THE CONTEXT

ST MARYS CHURCH

The Church, consecrated in 1910, is built of red-flecked sandstone and could seat 770 people when completed. The nave is 86 feet long, and the tower is 110 feet tall and can be seen for miles around; it is a significant landmark on the Mersey waterfront.

It has recently been recognised as a “Major Church of huge historical significance” by the Church Building Commission. It is one of the largest parish churches in the country and houses a three-manual keyboard organ. The tower is 100 Feet high, with 144 steps to reach the top. It houses one bell bearing the inscription ‘Christ is risen’. A Sunrise service is held at the top of the tower on Easter Sunday morning. In the church grounds is a roadside, or wayside, pulpit (one of only two in the U.K.) with the inscription “go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled”(Luke chapter 14 verse 23). The pulpit is made of red sandstone, has six steps, and is also Grade 2* listed.



THE CONTEXT

Clearly, any centenary building will have issues over maintenance, but as a grade II* listed building, historically, we have received generous grants from English heritage, including a total rewire, a major restoration of the tower, the re-roofing of the north side of the main roof, and more recently the re-roofing of the vestry (Parish Room). Attempts to seek funding from the same source to re-roof the south side of the main roof failed; hence, it remains in need of urgent work, particularly to the South side and the Lady Chapel.

The vicarage was built in 1959 to replace the original one on Parsonage Road, which was demolished to make way for the Silver Jubilee Bridge over the River Mersey.

PARISH COMMUNITY CENTRE

The PCC also runs a parish community centre comprising a large hall, a small hall and a meeting room. Church organisations and other groups use these extensively. The church organisations include three sections of a Boys' Brigade Company, plus Guides, Brownies, and Rainbow companies, all flourishing (approx. 100+ members). The parish centre is used daily by a community childcare organisation. Currently, we cannot offer its use for private events due to a depleted number of volunteers.



THE CONTEXT

SCHOOLS

Widnes Academy (West Bank School)

Historically, St Mary's Church has had a very close working relationship with the local West Bank Academy School, with the incumbent sitting on the school's governing body. We are very keen to boost this relationship and would like the incumbent to be a frequent and visible presence in our school.

The academy uses our Church for special events, such as its end-of-year Awards Presentation.

We also have a positive relationship with JIGGY, the local nursery school provider. They are based in our parish centre and support our children's events.



St Marys was pivotal in the creation of a West Bank Heritage Project. We housed a Heritage Exhibition and published a book of over 400 local heritage photographs. This was followed by developing a West Bank Heritage Website (www.westbankheritage.org.uk) which whilst it was active had over 72,000 annual visitors. The project is now archived and housed in the Catalyst museum.



Mother's Day flowers



Guides and Brownies



Christingle 2023



Community lunch in the Parish Centre



Good Friday morning



'Christ is Risen'
View from tower of the sun rising on
Easter Sunday



Annual Camp in Wales



Good Friday morning

THE CHURCH

WORSHIP

The Church is led by our licensed reader, who currently covers all areas of worship except the Holy Sacraments, which are taken by visiting clergy.

The Sunday service is held at 11:00 hours and has a small, dedicated congregation. We offer a Service of The Word with the occasional "Cafe style" service. Holy Communion is currently celebrated on the third and fifth Sundays of the month during morning worship; we would be very happy for it to be more frequent.

A keyboard provides the music, accompanied occasionally by the organist's granddaughter on the clarinet. Hymns and the liturgy are generally accessed via two screens, as are videos and other visual aids used in the services. All those attending services stay behind to enjoy refreshments; visiting clergy often comment on the strength of our fellowship.

THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH FAMILY

The majority of those attending church services are non-residents who enjoy returning to St. Mary's weekly to worship God and enjoy Christ's fellowship with other people.

The Electoral Roll numbers reported to the APCM in 2023 was 35, of which only 11 are residents. Due mainly to the lack of numbers, we are unable to elect our full quota to serve on the Parochial Church Council. Currently, we have only one churchwarden supported by an able deputy.

The PCC meets bimonthly, plus regular Standing Committee (minister, warden, deputy warden & treasurer) meetings to discuss the day-to-day running of the Church and to plan future events. Two PCC members have attended the LyCig course, which has been partially implemented. Church growth is at the forefront of our thoughts.

St Mary's is fortunate to have so many young people associated with it. At the moment, we do not have a Sunday school, but Christian teaching forms part of the mid-week meetings for the young people.

THE CHURCH

The youth organisations attend significant services preceded by a parade around the parish. On these occasions, the Boys' Brigade, Guides, Brownies and Rainbows take an active part in the service by reading from the bible, leading the prayers and performing sketches. With parental support, the congregation on these occasions is usually between 60 to 100, a large number of whom stay after the service for a lively and often lengthy 'coffee and chat'. It is a great opportunity to catch up and reach out.

Our Good Friday morning activities event always attracts a good number of children, as does the Christmas fair run by young people from the Girl Guides and Boys Brigade.

The Boys Brigade and Girl Guides have an annual camp in Wales in July, which is facilitated, fundraised for and attended by members of the wider church community. Whilst providing a holiday for children who may not otherwise get one, the camp also provides a brilliant opportunity to share daily worship and promote Christian ethos. It is the highlight of many young (and not so young!) people's year.



THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

Our numbers have reduced radically post-COVID. A large number of our congregation were elderly and vulnerable. The Church is growing in that we have attracted new members but insufficient to compensate those we lost.

We have a WhatsApp group and a "Facebook" page to keep the parishioners and those living further afield informed about parish events. We also use the West Bank Facebook page to promote special services and events. We also enjoy a facility on the "Church Near You" website.

St Mary's Church is now the only Church of any denomination in the parish. We are keen for other Christian denominations to use the building, but a lack of clergy on their part has prevented this from happening so far.

There have been two weddings, six baptisms and eight Funerals in Church during 2023. Many of the funerals are for people with an affinity to the parish who have lived outside its boundaries. To experience a funeral service of a person who lives in the parish is something to behold. Numbers attending can range from 100 to 500, as the whole local population seems to turn out.

THE CHURCH

THE CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

We have well-attended annual special services: Easter Day, including the Sunrise service at the top of the tower, Annual All Souls' Memorial Service, Remembrance Sunday and the Christingle Service.

The act of Remembrance on Remembrance Sunday is in two parts, beginning in the grounds of the local Mersey Hotel (affectionately known as The Snig due to it being originally situated in Snig Lane) before moving onto Church. Within The Snag grounds is a memorial to Thomas Wilkinson VC, a local WW2 serviceman.

Pre-Covid St Marys housed a popular Foodbank. We have recently been permitted to reopen it and are looking for volunteers to complete the new training programme.



THE CHURCH

OUR VISION

The opportunities for engagement within the local community are significant. As yet, we have been unable to restart our community lunch club or drama group (post-COVID). There is a need for a holiday club to provide lunches for school children, and we are keen to restart the food bank.

We would like to offer interdenominational worship that attracts the wider community and reaches out to the Filipino people in the area by offering more eucharist-based services.

We want to be able to offer a more accessible church. We have children and adults in wheelchairs and no disabled facilities. We have an amazing untapped resource in the trans Pennine trail passing our door. We would love glass doors to attract people to look into our beautiful Church and kitchen facilities so we can provide them with refreshments.

None of the above are impossible. Please come and help us serve both God and the community of West Bank in the way they deserve.

