

St Elizabeth's, Ashley PARISH PROFILE 2024



Introduction

St Elizabeth's Church, Ashley was built in 1880, and has a beautiful stained glass window, and carved wooden pews. The building remained largely unaltered until 2015, when an opportunity arose to add an extension containing a kitchen and toilet. At the same time we had a major fundraising exercise and were able to install a gas fired central heating system, fit carpets throughout and high-level lighting to supplement the original wall lights. The effect has been to make the building warm and welcoming.

The opportunity was also taken to remove several rows of pews at the rear of the church, giving space for community events and informal meetings. This area is known as the Ashley Centre. In addition, ageing trees and shrubs were removed from the gardens surrounding the church, so this lovely building is more visible to all who pass by.

We now have a multi-purpose building ideally suited to the superb rural location in which it is situated, and this is often remarked upon, particularly by people visiting for the first time. We are lucky to have a good-sized car park, adjacent to the church, and maintained by the church.



Surrounded by
beautiful farmland

Area

Ashley is a small rural village on the outskirts of Hale. It is predominantly tenanted farms and a small centre of private and social housing. The school was closed in 2004 but reopened in 2023 as a SEN school. There is a popular pub and thriving cricket club. There are a few small businesses operating in the area. There are hourly trains to Manchester and Chester. The pub is very popular with people from surrounding areas and the village is passed through by many walkers and cyclists on the way to more open areas from the nearby suburbs.

Worship

The church has one service each week, on Sundays at 11am. During the last three years we have developed a range of services, which are attracting new faces.

The first Sunday is led by members of the congregation and is titled our Community Service. We are indebted to a previous vicar for his help and guidance in developing this service, which has given opportunities to lay people to play a full part. It is often our most popular service of the month and it is followed by a coffee morning where most of the congregation stay to catch up with each other.

The second Sunday is usually Matins, often led by lay readers from our sister Church – St Peter's Hale – supplemented by other readers known or recommended to us.

The third Sunday is normally a Communion service, which for a number of years has been led by a retired vicar who lives locally.

The fourth Sundays are traditional Communion services and have been taken by our vicar who comes on from the service in Hale. This has been problematic as the vicar has often been late and it is not an ideal start to the service. We would like our new vicar to be at the church well before the start of the service.

Weekly music is provided by a young member of the congregation using CDs or Spotify. The church congregation is drawn from a mix of Ashley residents, and others from neighbouring parishes who enjoy the relaxed and friendly atmosphere offered.



People of all ages
are welcome here and
have a place to serve

Music and Concerts

We have been fortunate enough to be housing, free of charge, a Bosendorfer concert grand piano. This, together with the fact that a number of our congregation are professional musicians, has led us to follow a path of becoming a centre for music in the area. We hold a series of regular concerts in the church organised by a member of our congregation who is herself a concert pianist. She enlists colleagues and friends who have given a number of concerts. These are in the evening and lunchtimes.

We also have links with Chethams School of Music, RNCM and local choirs. They also come and perform for us throughout the year. In line with our belief that the church is always open to everyone, the concerts are free with a retiring collection. Part of the money raised has been put aside to pay professional musicians for their appearances.

Use of Buildings

Bookings are managed by a local resident and the church is rented out by various users from band practices to yoga classes to polling stations. The car park is used by local businesses in return for money towards its upkeep. The gardens are often used by passers by enjoying the calm.

We are blessed to have
gifted musicians
as part of our
church family



Administration

The monthly newsletter is prepared by the office administrator Alex Masters at St Peter's using contributions from the wardens. Alex also helps with the organisation of weddings, funerals and baptisms and any printing where required. There has been a suggestion to combine both churches newsletters. There is also a Facebook page for the church and one for the Rose Queen fête. Regular attendees of concerts are on an email list.

Rose Queen

There has been a Rose Queen fair in the village for many years in keeping with the traditions of many Cheshire villages. It now takes place in September and is a great opportunity for the village to celebrate and to raise funds for the church. It is a very well attended popular event that promotes the relationship between the church and the village. All funds go to the church. It is an evolving event and we try to ensure that it offers something for everyone. There is live music, a dog show, cakes, a BBQ and drinks.

At the heart of community in Ashley



Fundraising

In addition to the concerts and the Rose Queen, members of the congregation have set up a fundraising initiative called the Fab 50 to encourage people to donate on a monthly basis to the church. This has been very successful especially with non attending villagers who are attached to the church but unable to commit to regular attendance.

Support

This is not the place to list all, but worthy of note is that the church is well supported by long-established farming families, many of whom give significant amounts of time to the building of the extension. We are also fortunate in that we can call on a number of local families who give their time for free, doing repair jobs or cleaning the church.

In charge of a small team providing refreshments after services and social events is Dorothy Watkins.

The Church Wardens are Mike Whiting and Peter Hardern.

The Treasurer is Mike Whiting.

The PCC meets quarterly after the morning service.

We are grateful
for our volunteers
and all who
give their
support



Vision

Whoever is appointed to be our next vicar will also be the vicar of St Peter's Hale. At Ashley we fully recognise that the priority must be St Peter's and when appointing last time, we asked that the new incumbent take one service each month at St Elizabeth's, and that is what happened although we would request that the new vicar dedicate the Sunday in Ashley to Ashley rather than dash between Hale and Ashley.

Elsewhere is the jointly prepared Person Specification for our hoped-for appointee. As regards Ashley, we have seen the benefits of extending and modernising the building. We are attracting new people to the congregation, and the regular social events at the Ashley Centre have resulted in many people coming into the building for the first time all of whom are impressed by the building and the welcome they receive. St Elizabeth's is becoming a centre for excellent music. We would like our new vicar where possible to support us in this area, attending concerts where possible and enjoying what we have to offer.

Attracting new faces is one thing but keeping them and involving them in the life and witness of the church is another. We would hope that our next vicar would have the sensitivity and personal skills to encourage and develop those who are relatively new to church life. We are lucky, in that being a small church and congregation, people are all known by name and feel part of the family.

In recent years we have greatly benefited from the ministry of a succession of first class curates. All of them have said that the informality and warmth at St Elizabeth's has given them the opportunity to experiment with different forms of worship, and make the occasional mistake. This informality has also been greatly helpful in encouraging lay members to step forward and take the Community Service.

In conclusion, all that needs to be said is that whoever is appointed as our new vicar, he/she will have the wholehearted support of us all at St Elizabeth's.

[**www.stelizabethsashley.org.uk**](http://www.stelizabethsashley.org.uk)

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