



Treasured Times Exhibition: St John the Evangelist Church, Langley Upper Green

The highly successful '*Treasured Times*' Exhibition ran from 21 December 2014 to 4 January 2015 at St John the Evangelist Church, Langley Upper Green.

1. The Project.

Faced with dwindling congregations and a fear of possible closure, we launched a Christmas campaign to show what our 12th century parish church means to us.

We hoped it would attract visitors who share our vision of preserving St John the Evangelist for the future, and plans to re-order our Church to make a community space in the future.

Our unique community project began in October 2014 with appeals for photographs, stories and memories about the church for a Christmas display.

During this process, people re-connected with the Church space in the community, sending pictures of nativity and pet services, photographs of weddings, christenings, special memories, pictures and stories. Amongst these: a young lad who'd appeared as a baby in a crib in a nativity play (now 13) who sent us his 'selfie', his family sending us an archive of cuttings and wedding photographs, and creative drawings by an eight year old and her Grandfather celebrating the church space.

Many delved into their albums finding personal mementos and pictures they'd taken of the Church over the years. Residents tracked down a film made by Anglia TV about our village in the 70's, and a local teenager made a short four minute film, outlining Church history and asking for contributions to the display. This youngster's film was put on Church and Face book websites, leading to nearly 800 viewings.

As part of an appeal for 'selfies' - people visiting the Church and taking their photos - we were able to generate interest from further afield; the

assiduous preservation of Church archives and information by Vivienne Gates, Local History Recorder for Langley, meant we were also able to acquaint this wider audience with the history of our Church, along with bespoke materials prepared by Vivienne for the display.

As the project proceeded it in turn attracted further interest from historians and archivists: an appeal for information and help with unsolved historic mysteries led to further publicity and helped forge valuable and creative contacts for the future.

2. **Appeal for information.**

An appeal for information called on local historians for help, a story that was covered in the local press. This was the appeal:

CHRISTMAS CAMPAIGN TO SAVE VILLAGE CHURCH PUTS SPOTLIGHT ON HISTORIC MYSTERIES.

When villagers in Essex heard their Church was faced with closure, they came up with the idea of mounting a special display to show what their Norman Church meant to them.

Material poured in – from wedding and christening photos, to historic artefacts, maps, stories about villagers’ memories and treasured times.

But as residents started digging deeper into the history of St John the Evangelist Church in Langley Upper Green, they became curious about hidden mysteries.

Now they’re appealing to local historians to help them find out more in time for their display this Christmas.

Hidden plaque and graffiti.

‘When the Church roof was being restored in 2008, we found a small wooden plaque hidden in the rafters,’ says Vivienne Gates, Langley History Recorder.

‘We put it on show, but we’ve kept thinking about it over the years. The display really concentrated our minds.

There’s a scribbled name, ‘Thomas’. Was this left by a Victorian workman – if so, are there local connections? Can anyone help?’



Plaque, St John the Evangelist Church, Essex.

Carved into the walls of the church are more marks from those who came before; in 1664, the initials 'MF' and historic graffiti from the 19th century. 'Who made these marks, and why? It's become like a detective story. We'd love to hear from any local historians who might be able to help.'



Graffiti, St John the Evangelist Church, Langley, Essex.

'It's been fascinating delving into the history of our Church, and thrown up so many questions,' says Vivienne Gates.

'As well as the Victorian plaque and the historic graffiti, we're also trying to find out more about the history of our Church in the last century.

'We have a wooden crucifix at St John the Evangelist that we believe was taken to the trenches in the First World War – there is an inscription on the back. It's another story we're researching.

'It would be great to solve some of these mysteries in time for our display this Christmas, so anyone who might have any ideas, do get in touch.'

Museum discovery.

Villagers have also been in contact with Saffron Walden Museum, and have made another discovery.

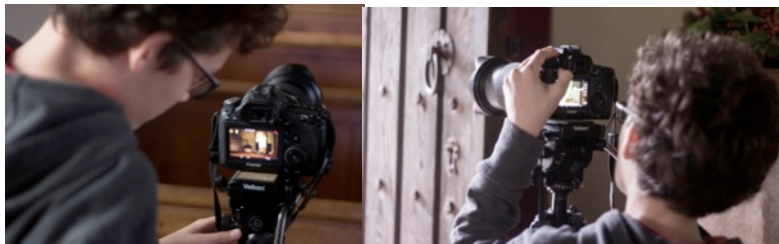
The Museum told them about a hand-drawn hearse used to take parishioners to their last resting place. It was given to the Museum collections in 1974, and is now in storage in Saffron Walden.

In the future residents say they'd be interested in putting it on display in Langley, as part of a more permanent exhibition of village history.

Film and Selfies.

Organisers say they've been amazed by the level of interest in their display – and not just from Langley residents.

As part of encouraging people to contribute to their Christmas exhibition, a local youngster made a film about the Church, urging people to visit and take 'selfies'.



Filming Langley Church, October 2014.

'We'd welcome selfies from anyone who'd like to come along to see our Church and support our campaign,' says Church Warden, Jane Woodhouse

Future plans.

Organisers hope their Christmas display will not only raise awareness of their 12th century church, but mean their Church can be saved for their community.

'We're so excited by what's happening to save our Church, in just a few months,' says Jane Woodhouse.

'What this could mean is that in the future we could raise funds to build a community space for future generations. We've got so many ideas about how this lovely place could be used – watch this space!'

The film about Langley Church can be viewed on the Langley Church face book page [langleychurch1](#) and on the 'Church Near You/St John the Evangelist Langley Upper Green' website.

3. The Display.

The project culminated in the opening of the display at the Carol Service on 21 December 2014 and ran until 4 January 2015.

'*Treasured Times*' had sections on the history of the Church, archives, records, and details about renovations from early times until the recent repair of the church roof in 2008, stories and photographs of weddings and christenings and projected onto wall of the Church, and running throughout the display - the Anglia TV Film from the 70's about Langley, 'Portrait of a Village'.

A history section compiled by Langley History Recorder Vivienne Gates showcased ancient artefacts together with old maps, information on our resident Pipistrelle Bats and details of Langley during the two world wars.

Beneath the St John the Evangelist WW1 memorial we displayed the last letter sent from the trenches by 19-year-old Dennis Wilson and on the wall below, the wooden crucifix taken there by Langley resident, Pte James Driver. On display were also details of Langley WW1 history contained in '*Lest We Forget; The First World War Memorials of Uttlesford District by Recorders of Uttlesford History.*'

Also available were Church archives and baptism registers dating from the 17th Century.



Treasured Times, screens and displays, December 2015.



Treasured Times, villagers photographs amongst flowers and candles in window sills and at the font, December 2015.

4. Appeal across generations.

Using resources specially developed for the display, children of all ages explored the Church and its' history, with very successful visits from a local Beavers and Cubs Group, and a Home Education Club. Educational resources included a Quiz, An I-Spy activity, and imaginative game 'Through These Doors'; youngsters also contributed drawings, thoughts and stories about the church. Essex Archivist Allyson Lewis provided very helpful guidance regarding educational resources we may use in the future.



Treasured Times display December 2015: Youngsters visiting.

Those involved both in the project and in the display ranged from very small children to our senior residents; one lovely moment was when an elderly resident came along as display opened with a found poem, and then read it when everyone congregated for our carol service. In addition, as interest grew, the display was attended not only by residents of our rural village but by visitors from further afield who came to see the display and to hear more about our church.

At the close of the exhibition, current and former residents of Langley came to share their memories - ending a project that began with young children, moved across generations, developed an on-going discussion about our plans, and ignited interest beyond our rural community.

Such was the success of the display, many asked if we could keep residents photographs of weddings and christenings, and other photographs of visits in the Church for a while longer, displayed amidst flowers on the window sills.



Christingle, January 2015.

5. Discussions following the Display.

This use of the Church for the display, has, in turn led to debate about further uses of the space community activities in the future, both in the immediate future and if re-ordering plans get underway.

An unexpected discovery is an enthusiasm for commemorating not only the history of the place, but events that have shaped our pasts. This has led to debate about whether, alongside the creation of a community space, we could accommodate an on-going heritage project, to build on our living history, making links locally and further afield.

Ideas we've discussed include making further connections with local schools, history and heritage groups and creating a digital and film archive accessible to local historians. Drawing on other examples – e.g. the Built To InSpire project at St Mary of Charity, Faversham – we could explore ideas to make a future community space an inspiring and relevant resource for local pupils and lifelong learners. We could encourage visitors to explore this heritage project, establishing links, for example, with the Churches Tourism Association in Chelmsford, the Open Churches Trust and so on.

6. Assistance of Local Historians.

As the display project proceeded, and during the course of the exhibition, our Langley History Recorder received a great deal of help from local historians, including Clavering Local History Recorder Jacqueline Cooper who supplied materials. We were also in contact with other historians and bodies who were extremely helpful, including Saffron Walden Museum, Saffron Walden Library and Zofia Everett at the ERO Access Point in Saffron Walden who wrote:

'I am delighted that you are determined to save your ancient Church. Bureaucracies do not grasp the importance of the long continuity of communities and their history which in earlier periods is closely bound with the church. The church was not only the place of worship in the earlier period, but the main meeting and even trading place. It was the place where debts and rents were paid and formal documents exchanged and much much more...'

Saffron Walden Museum. Curator Carolyn Wingfield sent the following very helpful email about the 'Langley Hearse'. We put pictures of this in our exhibition.

'... your campaign to save your parish church... I do think you should have an image of the Langley Parish Hearse, which used to take parishioners to their last resting place. It is hand-drawn (i.e. pulled by people, not horses), is fairly light and very easy to move, and simply but beautifully made. It was given to the Museum collections in 1974; at that time the Museum had a display of agricultural implements and horse-drawn vehicles in the Stables at Audley End, but when English Heritage wanted the Stables cleared in 1995, the hearse had to be stored in a barn elsewhere as the Museum had no space to display it. I am glad to say that it is now safe in our new off-site store in Saffron Walden, and I hope eventually to get it on display if we can extend and improve the Museum in a couple of years time...'

Catalogue: HEARSE from Langley parish, Essex 1974.30 . Hand-drawn, formerly used as the parish hearse. 7ft 8 inches long and 5ft 6 inches high (2.4m long x 1.4m wide x 1.7m high).

Historical Graffiti and Wooden Plaque.

An expert in historical graffiti, Bari Hooper came to visit the display. We had asked Bari about the initials and carvings on church walls dating from 1664 and about a wooden plaque, as above dated in 1884 and discovered during roof renovations in 2008. Following his visit to the display, Bari Hooper wrote:

Prior to the 1895 restoration of the church there would almost certainly have been early graffiti on the surrounds of the doors and windows of the nave and the chancel. Now almost all that remains is confined to the tower. As you are aware the dated initials range from the second half of the 17th to late 19th century. The lower stages of the tower are 14th century in date as is the west window. Unfortunately these areas are much obscured by lime wash; however, if this were carefully removed there is every possibility that earlier dated graffiti might be revealed... after consulting a specialist in the constituency of lime

wash (See the website of the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings SPAB)... The two apotropaic symbols present amongst the graffiti are, you may recall from our talk, the hexafoil (six equidistant leaves within a circle) and the pentacle (five-pointed star).

Apotropaic is the folklorists term for 'warding off evil influences'. Most of the very many apotropaic symbols in our churches were scratched on the walls before the Reformation. Belief in the power of such things was discouraged after the break with Rome. Your exhibition of items found locally was most interesting and is certainly only a fraction of the many things that must surely still to be discovered in the homes of the villagers. The piece of wood found in the church tower looks to me as though it is an off-cut from a larger piece of wood which may have had more words on it. Beneath the name 'Thomas' are the words 'Rus & pe . . ?' I have seen the name Ruse spelt Rus, but it was in a 16th century document, so is unlikely to apply here. Perhaps 'Rus' is short for Russell, Thomas's workmate? It is a mystery that will probably never be answered, but nevertheless it remains as part of the history of the church. I had a go at looking for the double horseshoe iron founder's trademark, but without success. I will keep searching. As for the 1968 newspaper still stuffed in the stove, Take it out and open it up. Who knows what it might contain? An illicit love-letter to the vicar, or the remains of fish and chips! If nothing else, it gives you an approximate date for the last time the stove was used. When writing a history of a place no detail is too trivial to record.'

Langley Census, 1841- 1901

Ken Wilson, another local historian and former Langley Resident also visited our exhibition to share a research product he has conducted based on analysis of the Census from 1841 – 1901. Ken's study: '*Langley its People and Occupations, 1841 – 1901*' gives an insight into the families of Langley Lower Green and Langley Upper Green between these years. From this fascinating piece of work, it appears that during this period, the village was mostly self-sufficient, in that Grocers, Bakers, Butchers and Innkeepers were to be found along with Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Thatchers and Shoemakers.

Oral History

As above, during the course of the display, many current and former residents of Langley met to share their memories of the village, including particular memories of the former primary school in Langley Upper Green and Langley during World War 2. It is hoped we can build in this oral history in the future, and indeed build on the success of this community project in the months to come.

Vivienne Gates, Langley History Recorder, and Sarah Spiller, Langley Resident.

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