

**Name of project/group**

Yarpole Community Shop - St Leonard's Church

**Type of project**

Social action / community empowerment / opening up public services

**Location**

Yarpole, Diocese of Hereford, West Midlands

**What was involved**

Yarpole is a small rural village with a population of only 700 people, of which 70 are on the church's electoral roll. Lying in the centre of the village is St Leonard's, a simple single aisle church dating from the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. The church retains some of its historic fabric, but was extensively restored and extended by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott in 1864. The main church building is Grade II\* while to the south lies the Grade I listed bell tower dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

The project was driven by the need for a new permanent home for the village shop. There is a village hall, but this was some distance away and there was a wish to make St Leonard's a focus for the local community. The plan was to slot a box into the West end of the nave with a shop downstairs and gallery with café and kitchen upstairs. The Victorian side aisle would be used to house the vestry and lavatories. The village wanted a sustainable and environmentally friendly building and, following discussions with an environmental consultant, a wood pellet boiler was installed. This was found to be the most efficient way to power the under-floor heating needed to produce a welcoming space.

**Achievements**

The Parish Plan (2005) stressed the importance of the village shop, and, separately, the need for more use to be made of the church. Following the closure of the village shop soon after the plan was published in 2005 a co-operative was set up in a temporary portacabin behind the local pub.

Subsequent research into possible permanent sites for the shop identified the church as a possible home. This involved an extensive program of re-ordering to accommodate the shop, the post office and a whole range of community activities and events. The village shop and post office have been saved, the church fabric maintained and the whole community enriched by this sustainable project.

In 2011 Yarpole St Leonard's was voted 'Best Village Shop in Britain' at the Countryside Alliance 'Rural Oscars' Awards – images here

<http://www.countryside-alliance.org.uk/awards/2010-champions/>

Judges called the shop “the centre of [a] vibrant rural community”



### **Future plans**

Buoyed by the success of this project, there are now plans to extend the underfloor heating system to the Chancel, and to reorder this part of the church. The church is also considering the installation of a glazed porch to allow the main doors to stand open without the loss of heat.

### **Lessons Learnt**

Focus on

- Achievable outcomes: some time was lost trying to progress the work to the chancel as part of the main shop project. The debate about provision of a screen between the chancel and the nave distracted from the achievable goals.
- External fund-raising: this was very time-consuming, and it would have been helpful to set up a dedicated fund-raising team earlier to become familiar with the processes involved, and the different nuances required by funding organisations. Moreover, the need to spend some funding in a specific financial year produced some challenges in cash-flow management.

### **Project contact**

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