



Royal Agricultural Society of England

Satellite Post Office and new meeting facilities in Sheepy Magna Church

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By Revd Annette Reed, Team Vicar Bosworth and Sheepy Group

When the shop in Sheepy Magna (south west Leicestershire) closed in March 2003, the post office needed alternative accommodation. Sheepy Church Council and the Revd Annette Reed had the idea of offering to adapt the base of the tower of the medieval village parish church, as premises for the new satellite post office. "I well remember that feeling of suddenly being caught up by an idea which excited me, but also seemed impossible to achieve," says Annette.

Over the ensuing weeks, the seeds of inspiration took root. The project involved major changes to the church, not least introducing water and sewerage provision. Beside the post office room in the tower base, there is now also a disabled toilet facility, a new community meeting area which has been created out of the west end of the north aisle and improved and adapted access to the church for people with mobility problems. As the work progressed there was great excitement at the discovery of some 17th century graffiti on what is now the toilet wall: "a pleasure to read when one is in situ!" High quality English oak was used for much of the construction work to complement the existing architecture. The intention was to open by Christmas 2003 and this was achieved; the first stamp was purchased on 8 December.

The post office is open two mornings per week and at the same time refreshments are served in the new community area which has also opened up the church for much wider use. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council run a community helpdesk in the church on Tuesday mornings when the post office is open, making access to advice on a wide range of issues available to local people. A Pensions Advisory Service Officer comes every second Tuesday of the month, to advise on a wide range of pension issues.

The facilities are well used, not only for church activities, but also for new initiatives which have sprung up. The new singing and art groups meet there regularly, and there have been concerts hosted by the church including one given by international classical singer Emma Kirkby.

Fundraising was rather like putting a puzzle together – without knowing how many pieces would be found or quite what the end picture would look like! Even so, the project rapidly caught the imagination of all those involved. Twelve organisations contributed towards the total cost of £45,500, grant aiding between £1000 – £5000 each. Contributing bodies included: Leicestershire County Council, Leicestershire Post Office Development Scheme, the Sub-post office Start-up Capital Subsidy Scheme, Melton, Rutland and Harborough Primary Health Trust, Leicester Diocesan Mission Initiative Fund and Sheepy District Church Council.

Annette Reed reflects on the new facilities: "We are all delighted that we were able to raise sufficient funds in order to offer the community this valuable service. So far uptake of these new facilities in church has been very encouraging and it is wonderful to have people dropping in on post office mornings and enjoying a chat together." It was appropriate that it was Maundy Thursday when the post office was officially opened by the village's oldest resident, Mrs Lucy Wood. On Maundy Thursday Jesus enacted the role of the servant, washing the disciples' feet. Where better to ponder the role of service in the community than in the local post office?