



# Brightholmlee Methodist Church

## A Time of Joy

In September 2023, the Church members met their newly assigned minister, over tea and cake, and talked through what they wanted their church to be. The immediate challenge was to explain to others why they wanted to install a new kitchen. “So that we can host the community!” was the direct answer. “We want to put this chapel back to being the heart of the village and its surrounding hamlets and estates. We want this building to be a resource for the village. We want the church to live again as the beating heart of the village. We want it to be a sustainable worshipping community in the heart of a vibrant community”

“OK,” was the answer, “how are we going to do that?” Over the next three months we planned and installed the new community kitchen, but far more significantly, we invited the people of the local community to come to an open meeting on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2024. “10.00 for coffee and cake and tell us what you want.” We sat there that morning with the kettle on wondering if anyone would come. Over 40 people came, full of ideas, from all over the village. Old and young. We drew up a list of 12 priorities and decided in which order to tackle them. First off, we would create a Community Café, on Wednesdays, which the church was already wanting to do. Then the young people wanted play equipment in the park and a youth club night in the community centre.

Three and a half weeks later the café opened. The church decorated the hall in those three weeks, and completed the kitchen. A new group of women volunteers organised themselves as a core team with more volunteers. Posters went up. The school magazine invited people. But, again, we were sitting there anxiously. We should not have been. Over 60 people came that first Wednesday. As we write, over 80 came last Wednesday. We are not serving full English and selling it cheaply to families that want a cheap breakfast. We are making a space for people to meet, make new friends, offer themselves to the village in service, discover the church is open and welcoming. Proposing new ideas. It has become an engine of volunteer action.

When we all met at the next Saturday Community meeting, in February, we decided to form a Community Development Association, create a charity, open a bank account, and make the various powers know we are here, and on the move. They have all responded with delight. The Town Mayor said she had never encountered such energy.

And it has changed us. People in the community tell us how there is a new expectation in the community and sense the making of a vibrant community. People who come tell us how much they value the church being alive and welcoming to them. And the congregation has a new belief that we can do this.

What are the highlights a year on?

- 6 new members joined the church last Easter, and 2 or 3 more are waiting in the wings for this Easter.
- The church’s toddler group, which was down to two toddlers and a question mark hung over it, is now filling the hall; “Careful where you walk.!”

- The church has appointed a 2 day a week community worker for three years to work with the church and community, who is already developing new activities and relationships that will enhance the sustainability and purpose of the church in the village.
- One group has begun work with the City Council over parks provision and youth provision.
- One Christian man is planning with us a regular men's discussion group, which will encourage men to talk with each other, and consider issues of spirituality.
- One woman who has helped in the Café, is starting a crafting session for older people. Crafting OK; space to talk YES!
- Another sub-set of the church and community volunteers is planning a local history workshop group.
- New planters are being sourced for the village green, to replace the old broken ones.
- Our main partner group, the local drama group, who have rehearsed and performed here for over 20 years, is joining in with us to create a project with more space, better access, compliant services, and re-vamp of the worship area.

We could not have imagined the energy this outreach has created in both the community and the church. We have found a body of volunteers who want to make things happen and are thrilled that the church wants to be in the mix and help them do it. They want to reach out to the growing community as new estates are being built within their area.

Alongside that may be an oral history project between the church and the community. Which is only fitting. The church was built in 1807 by a man called Thomas Holy, whose mother came from this parish. He was a friend of John Wesley, and a member at Carver Street. Because he was a successful silversmith and button-maker, he was a great benefactor to the Methodist Circuit. All of you who shop in Sheffield can stand at the entrance to Atkinsons, and imagine yourselves standing alongside the little village green that stood there on Sheffield Moor before all the development began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And as you look to your left you will see the little stub of a street called Holy Lane. Not because it was ever a 'holy' place, but because it was where Thomas Holy had his button factory. Our new logo is a photo of an 18<sup>th</sup> century button, with BMC.



At our Covenant Service this year, the members shared the peace with shaking hands, conscious, and energised, by knowing that they were the descendants of those who had shaken the hand of Wesley, and they were about their Lord's work as he had been.