

Thursday 31st Mar 2022 7.30pm
St Thomas' Church

A very good evening to you all - - I hope you are warm enough – on the snowy wintery day we've had today - and **welcome to St. Thomas's Church**, a Church that's very dear to so many of us who worship here, and which does play a part in our local communities too - those of us who live locally or around the area or even those who reside a bit further afield- many of us see the building – the churchyard – and recognise it as a place with a history – but maybe - we - all need to become more aware that it - has a future too. You may have received a leaflet through your door about this evening's meeting – which just in outline - I hope - has tempted us to find out more in the few minutes we have tonight.

Maybe you have been here many times before for baptisms and for weddings and maybe even sadly for funerals too. You may have been to our Christmas Eve Christingle service or to one of the celebration services or perhaps to a few of our parade services with the uniformed groups.

You may have been here many times or not at all – and especially if it is your first time here at Thomas' – a particular welcome to you. Today we have a chance to think about both the future and the present day - and a little of the past as well - as we meet together.

Just as a word of introduction – My Name is Revd. Richard Coutts – I'm rector of the parish here in Stanningley – Also

speaking today will be John Walker – and from friends of Farsley St John Jim Humphries.

The format for this evening is that we are going to speak – hopefully fairly briefly - about the opening up of the church – - as locals we see the building but quite often want to have at least some say in what happens to it.

So we will present to you albeit briefly – why you might want to get involved in being a friend of St Thomas' – and the three of us in different capacities are here to help with that – then after we have given short presentations – there will be a chance to ask questions – and we will try and answer those to the best of our ability.

Before the questions there will be a break for refreshments, and I would like to thank everyone from the Scouts who are helping with those this evening. Our uniformed organisations, children's groups and local people who use the hall regularly are a great help to us – so a particularly big thankyou to the scouts and everyone else who has helped arrange this meeting.

It's the legacy of all of us of course. Whether we attend this church or not – no matter who we are – we will ask how - we can become someone with a stake in this place... a friend of St Thomas'.

Just to let you know ahead of time – that a clip board will be making its rounds – please write down your name and contact information – address phone and email – and whether you are interested in taking this further.

As we think of the present and of the future, we ought to consider the past as well, because this church has been so very important to countless people over the decades and in fact over the last two odd centuries since it was opened.

The church has played host to some important weddings – Ernie Wise’s parents were married in this very building, and it’s likely that this was little Ern’s very first church as he lived on Atlanta Street just over the other side of the traffic lights. And the 1966 victorious world cup squad - Jackie Charlton and others paid us a visit on the day of Norman Hunters wedding here. Norman who played of course for Leeds United.

The interest that we have in our physical heritage here in this location in Stanningley has developed and changed over the years – but one important and beautiful landmark which is enjoyed by many is the churchyard.

There are over five and a half thousand graves here, and each tells a story in this part of Leeds. One of those stories is that of two young St Thomas’ Sunday school teachers, Emma Carrick and Thomas Hardaker who were courting in 1869. On their way back to Stanningley from Farsley, one Sunday evening they were both tragically killed by a strike of lightning. Their funeral attended by over 7000 people was reported in more than one hundred and twenty newspapers across the world. A window – ‘the lightning window’ - in the church commemorates them, and their grave is just outside the main doors.

Our family connections are sometimes - oftentimes rooted physically in places. This is one such place.

This church too is part of our shared heritage. We all – well most of us would like to see its legacy and gift to us change and extend into the future. Most of us have differing opinions on how churches should change – or if they should change.

Our own homes and houses may have been built during the deprivation of the second world war or maybe even much earlier – but that doesn’t mean we can’t enjoy double glazing in our own day and age, however we would not like to lose the character of our home through window improvements or through the addition of an inside toilet. Preservation and conservation are good and proper just as they balanced good usage and community benefit – and we are not just thinking here of the building as it was when it was opened – but for the present day and future days too.

In addition, we appreciate the rarity of St Thomas’ church - when we had an engineer’s inspection of the central arch a couple of years ago – the inspector voiced his appreciation of the Barrel Vault Ceiling, the Arch and other features of St Thomas’ – such as the two aisles and also the balcony above us at the back. It really is a special place.

When we look at the church here - around us - we realise that the church is not in the condition we would wish it to be. Part of the problem was that when it was built it was relatively cheaply constructed - you will notice that the walls are literally held together by bars of steel across the ceiling. This is because the church does not have the kind of modern foundations which we would build today and neither was its

design entirely self-supporting in the manner planned. It doesn't have a damp course and was built without any insulation either.

We are left with the legacy and the joy of decision making – and of the work required to rectify some of the mistakes of yesteryear.

Yet we perceive our role, is not to just put sticking plaster on the problems of the past, but to actively plan for the future life of this building, the hall and the churchyard for the generations that follow our own.

You and I – us – as people – not as two divided groups – but people who share a common interest and - even passion – we can be people who share this heritage and history and protect it and develop it for future generations.

My associate - John, I believe is going to take over from me in just a moment – to explain what the options are of being a friend of St Thomas – of what this might mean for you and for all of us....