

The Eco Church story: St John's Menston- more of a tortoise than a hare!

The St John's Eco church journey towards being awarded "Bronze" in May 2019 started back in 2009! Church members had heard a talk from Dave Bookless at Greenbelt where he recounted his awakening to God's love of creation. His story was detailed in his book, "Planetwise – Dare to care for God's world". Dave was working for A Rocha at that time and so the embryonic "Green Group" focussed on A Rocha resources to start to "green" the church.



The book was studied by a small group and an Eco -Congregation audit undertaken but it was a rather cumbersome paper based process – I still have lots of the modules in paper form!

At about the same time, the Church of England initiative, Shrinking the Footprint, was launched together with the formation of green groups in the Diocese of Bradford and "Green Apostles" for Deaneries. Otley Deanery embraced this and various churches took initiatives to forward the green agenda.

In Menston, we organised a visit to a sustainable energy project – Gibson Mill at Hardcastle Crag; arranged a clothes swap evening and restarted "Beating the Bounds" at Rogation. At the same time, encouragement was given through the Parish Magazine to "Live Lightly" based on tips from the A Rocha website.

The church was also working on replacing our heating system so exploration took place around ground source heat pumps and other renewable sources of energy. In the end though, we replaced the gas boilers but they are much more efficient.

We suffered a bit of a down turn in manpower in the group between 2012 and 2016 but were re-invigorated by the re-launch of Eco Congregation into Eco Church that took place in 2016. In the same year, one member of the team met Jo Musker-Sherwood from "Hope for the Future". Jo was keen to work with churches to lobby MP's about climate issues. A meeting was set up with the local MP in February 2017 and issues around fuel poverty, insulation, retro-fitting and VAT on community energy projects were discussed. Jemima Parker, Diocesan Environmental officer was instrumental in getting this off the ground.

That meeting led to encouragement to arrange a renewable energy event in March 2018 at which the local MP and others would debate whether renewable energy can be affordable and provide benefits to the local community. About 60 people attended and drew in people from the local area and farther afield.



Meeting Philip Davies MP

Following this, the group re-assessed the St John's scores and it looked like we were close to a Bronze award but needed a few more points in the Lifestyle section. We encouraged people to undertake carbon footprint measuring and promoted other low carbon behaviour. The group have continued to encourage this and in May 2019, concluded that we had reached "bronze" award standard. The PCC were informed and here we are!

I am shocked by the time it has taken but we hope the drip, drip effect has meant that we hope we have embedded the principles of caring for the planet into our church life and local community. There is much still to do and even much greater urgency but the Eco Church programme has given us a framework to work through and we plan to keep going!

Marilyn Banister

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