

Case Study - Church Tourism Heritage Event at Aysgarth

July 11-14th 2009

St Andrew's, Aysgarth (Upper Wensleydale)

Type of Event

Open church heritage weekend plus school visits. Including family tree research, local history exhibition, guided tours of the church and churchyard, official launch of new illustrated Visitors' Guide, and churchyard party with teas, stalls and some faith-based literature.

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Church website

<http://www.standrewschurchaysgarth.org.uk>

<http://www.pipspatch.com> (see Fun at Aysgarth Church)

Facts and Figures

The organisers of this event calculated some of its 'vital statistics' - especially useful to those thinking of doing something similar. They estimated that >600 hours of volunteer time had been needed, together with >200 hours of time contributed voluntarily by professional people whose normal fees would have been at least £15/hour.

Financial assistance towards the event came in the form of a £4050 grant from Awards for All (Heritage Lottery funded) and there was also a gift of £50 towards the cost of electricity in the church for the event.

Over 650 people visited the church, including 200 children from local schools.

Pip Land writes -

The first ever heritage event at Aysgarth church was held because the parochial church council wanted to do something special for the community - and we certainly felt we achieved that. Over 600 people saw the exhibition including children from local schools. That so much was achieved in such a short time was dependent upon two factors: the grant received from Awards for All which is Lottery funded and the hundreds of hours of work put in by the church's team of volunteers. This included clearing the churchyard of dangerous items so that it was safe for children and adults to go on tours around the gravestones.

For those who visited the church on July 11-12 there were free souvenir copies of the new Visitors' Guide and of Barry Thornton's essay about the

Jervaulx Screen with both publications being full of colour illustrations. Barry's essay particularly highlighted the meaning of the odd creatures carved on the frieze of the screen. This proved fascinating not only to adults but also to the 200 or more local school children who visited the church on July 13-14. For the school children there were guided question and answer tours of the church and graveyard which helped to make them feel at home in the church. The tours were as educational for those leading them as they were for the children. For instance in response to the question "Why do we have stained glass windows in church?" two young boys responded "That's so the light of God can shine through Jesus to us." The children from West Burton CofE school made their own special contribution by writing about their grandparents, several of whom being buried in Aysgarth churchyard. Ann Holubecki and José Hopper, who had helped so much with the research for the event, knew all about that - for the Hopper vault is also there. Their family history was among those described in the exhibition. And just to make sure visitors did not miss that vault there was a JR Hopper "To Let" sign placed beside it. Many walkers stopped to ask about that. Ann and José, with Evelyn Abraham, manned the popular family history research table throughout the weekend.

The heritage displays were mounted on the first-class boards rented from Arts in Richmondshire. The illustrated displays amounted to over 110 pages. The subjects covered ranged from the Christian history of the dales back to pre-Roman times to the integration of the church and community during the last two centuries, and the contribution made to the church by such local families as the Tunstalls and the Winns/Ritchies. The display about those from the parish who died during the two world wars and the Iraq war attracted a lot of attention. That display was only possible thanks to the permission given by Keith Taylor to take information from his book *Wensleydale Remembered*, and also due to the help of some local families.

The exhibition funded by Awards for All was in the main body of the church while the Lady Chapel remained the domain of the church community. The tea room in there during the heritage weekend meant there was somewhere to sit and chat, to share memories and reflect on the exhibition. On the Saturday the doors of the Lady Chapel were opened and a churchyard party with stalls was held outside. And in the Lady Chapel there was a church funded display which included free literature explaining our faith to anyone who wished to know more about Christianity.

That literature, which was selected by the vicar and purchased from CPO, is still available in the church as there is a regular stream of visitors. The free copies of Barry's essay are also there, and the church has paid for more copies of the illustrated Visitors' Guides. The display about those from the parish who died during the two world wars and in the Iraq war will be on show for the bereavement service on November 1 and for the Remembrance service on November 8.

Pip Land, Aysgarth church heritage officer.