

# St Mary Magdalene, Whalton Parish Profile



Facing south on raised ground to the south of the village, St Mary Magdalene's Church Whalton provides a local landmark, seen from many miles away. The building took on its present form in a 13<sup>th</sup> century remodelling, followed by restoration in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the porch added in 1908.

Designated as a Conservation village *"The uncommonly pretty village street is long and almost*

*broad enough to be termed a green. It has a number of good buildings. ...Manor House, an interesting conversion job of Sir Edwyn Lutyens"* Pevsner's *Buildings of England, Northumberland*

## Whalton Parish

Whalton's parish boundary surrounds an area of approximately 24sq miles. It includes the villages of Whalton and Ogle, and many outlying farms and clusters of occupation in buildings converted from their original purpose as agricultural buildings.

The population is growing and changing as its proximity to national and international transport routes and easy commuting to Newcastle upon Tyne is recognised. Whalton Church of England Primary School offers an additional benefit that, alongside the growing awareness of the quality of life offered in Northumberland, sees the village becoming increasingly popular with young professional families.

Whalton lies six miles from Morpeth, where there is a mainline railway station, and eight miles from Ponteland and Newcastle International Airport. The centre of Newcastle upon Tyne is a 30 minute drive (17 miles).

The Church of England Primary School, the Beresford Arms pub designated as an Asset of Community Value, and a vibrantly programmed Village Hall, provide a base for both social and essential services to the community alongside the church.

Ogle is a modest village about 1.5 miles from Whalton with about 35 dwellings but no pub, shop, church or school. In the middle-ages Ogle was a significant settlement with a church, a pastoral economy and a Castle important enough to hold King David the Second of Scotland as a royal prisoner following his defeat at the Battle of Neville's Cross in 1346. The Castle is now a private home.

## Population

Using census data from 2011 for the combined parishes of Whalton and Ogle, the demography is:

Population 474 of which nearly 19% were aged 5-15 and just over 50% 25-64. Social rented households equal 11%, and private rented 23.5%. Socio-economic classification sees 26% of the residents classed as having Lower Managerial and Professional Occupations, 17% Higher Managerial, Admin and Professional, and Small Employers and Own Account Works circa 21%. 70% of the whole population are economically active, and 16% retired.



Whalton Village Show held annually in September

## St Mary Magdalene, Whalton

A Grade 1 listed building, its tower and origins are probably 11<sup>th</sup> century. The 12<sup>th</sup> century respond of the north aisle illustrates that there was at least a north aisle by the early 12<sup>th</sup> century but the present form of the building results from extensive remodelling in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. There are other elements of the church that survive from this time including the double chamfered three bay arcades and the west lancets of the aisles.

The chancel windows, which date to an 1890 restoration by Hicks and Charlewood, are augmented by 14<sup>th</sup> century reticulated tracery in the chancel's east and south aisle east windows. The font dates from the 1400s. The church clock, still in working order, is an example of an 18<sup>th</sup> century single handed clock face on the east side of the tower.

To the north is the Ogle Chapel, including early armorial floor slabs of 1564, 1566, and 1613, and early 19<sup>th</sup> century wall monuments to the Ogle family by E H Baily, a prodigious public sculptor probably best known for his sculpture of Lord Nelson in London's Trafalgar Square.

## The future of the church building

Our most recent Quinquennial Inspection was 2021 and we are using a restricted grant from a charitable trust for the necessary repairs. Alongside the publication of the 2021 QI Report, a consultation with local residents and the school has begun to identify additional uses of the building that complement its primary purpose as a place of worship. From the many ideas put forward our Quinquennial Conservation Architect is pulling together three draft

proposals matching those uses to provide the basis for continuing discussion with the community. It is most likely that the repurposing and rejuvenation of the church will go hand in hand with the repairs identified as necessary in the QI Report.

Whalton Parish Council provide an annual grant for Churchyard maintenance. There are four Grade II listed tombs in the churchyard.

## Congregation

The regular congregation are a relatively mature bunch, significantly augmented every six weeks by the Friday morning service for the School. Harvest Festival, Lent, Easter and Christmas services also attract larger congregations with participation from the school at many of these services.

The capacity of the Ministry team has inevitably been stretched by the current vacancy with the visibility of the team and the number of services reducing from a regular every other week to Holy Communion once a month and a monthly family service. Together with the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, there has been no opportunity for growth of Mission, Vision or congregation of late. During March 2022 our Electoral Roll has grown by almost 100% to nearly 70 (for ratification at our APCM in May 2022).

## The Rectory

The four-bedroom, three reception room 'new' Rectory was built in the 1950s, replacing The Old Rectory (now a private house) originally built as a fortified tower in the 1300s. The new Rectory is south facing with extensive views across farmland. It has an orchard to one side and a large garden, immediately adjoining the churchyard. It is currently tenanted.

## Whalton Church of England Primary School

The school is set immediately alongside the church. It is rated as a Good School by Ofsted and as Outstanding by the Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools (SIAMS). Providing education for children aged from 5-11 years, it is Federated with St Helen's Church of England Primary School in Longhorsley (to which children from Netherwitton, also in our Benefice, traditionally go). There are 50+ children in Whalton school, who can transfer to secondary school in either Morpeth or Ponteland. Morpeth offers three tier education so children can transfer at 9, where the Ponteland offer is two tier with transition at 11. There is Collective Worship in School each Friday morning, and every six weeks this is held in the Church and parents are invited. The children and staff are closely involved with other church occasions, Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas, Easter and a service each summer for those leaving to move to high schools.

Pupils enter Reception with standards which are broadly typical of national standards. The percentage of pupils with special educational needs, or who are disadvantaged, is below the national average. The School grounds are also home to Pre and After School at Whalton School (PAWS) catering for children from 2 until they enter Reception. They offer pre-school, breakfast club, after school club and holiday club for the wider age group. <http://www.whalton.northumberland.sch.uk/website>



Whalton Primary pupils dressed as Bible Characters for World Book Day

## Traditions



Northumberland Baal fires were an annual tradition in the Middle Ages celebrated in many villages in the county. Whalton is the only village in which this tradition has consistently been upheld, even through World Wars I and II when the bonfire was replaced by the lighting and speedy extinguishing of a few small twigs. Whalton is probably the last example of these traditional fires anywhere in the County. It is said that in years gone by villagers jumped over and through the flames of the fire. No

such thing happens today but the village is all involved in building the fire, and celebrations including watching children from Whalton CofE Primary School dance round the fire. The site for the fire remains where it has always been in the centre of the village, now just to the east of the Beresford Arms. The Baal Fire in Whalton It takes place each year on 4<sup>th</sup> July.

Each year the Margaret Moore Charitable Trust, established in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to provide educational activities for the children of the parish, hosts a handwriting competition. Entries from Whalton Primary School are displayed in the church and judged at, and as part of, the annual Village Show. Margaret Moore was resident in The Moore House, Whalton, the matriarch of the local farming Moore family, she bequeathed a small endowment for this purpose.



## Whalton Village Hall

Run as a Community Interest Organisation (CIO), the Village Hall plays host to a wide range of activities serving the community at all stages of their lives. There is toddler group on a Thursday morning, yoga on a Monday evening, Senior Exercise Class on Wednesday mornings, Whist on a Monday, Garden Club once a month, a weekly Art Club, and many others.

There are village celebrations across the year in the Hall starting with Burns Night in January, Whalton Village Show in September, Bonfire Night in November, and, in partnership with the church, carols around the tree each December. The Village Hall is a popular choice for wedding receptions as it offers great views across the fields to the south.

## Communications

Whilst there is no public transport in Whalton, secondary school children are bused to schools in Morpeth or Ponteland. The village lies 6 miles/10 minutes from the A1, and from Morpeth where the station is on the East Coast mainline with regular services to all destinations in England and Scotland, and links to services to the West and Wales. Newcastle's International Airport, 8 miles/15 minutes away, has daily flights to national and international destinations including Dubai via Emirates.

There is a good fibre broadband service and an active What's App group. Social Media and the village website exist but it's true to say that their maintenance is not always as regular as social sites run by business!

## Financial

With the success of a renewed focus on the Electoral Roll, a similar initiative for planned giving will follow.

Fundraising activities include the annual Whalton Village Show, a parish meal, a jumble sale, and, the most recent initiative, providing teas at the National Garden Scheme open garden day in the village. Whilst these are important fundraising events, they play another key role in bringing the community together. In the 5 years pre-Covid, when the community could actively and very enjoyably raise funds, the average payment of the Parish Share was 91%.



Rev. Fiona Sample at Whalton NGS Open Day

## Health and Social Care

Nearly all services are provided outside the village with doctor surgeries in Morpeth, Scots Gap and Ponteland. A visiting Chiropodist comes to the Village Hall once a week.

The Post Office travels to the village each Thursday morning and sets up with a full range of its services in the Village Hall. The local shop in Belsay – 3 miles away – is a good general store open 7 days a week, and a post office 5 days a week.

Northumberland County Library Service visits Whalton once a week. Opened at the end of 2021, the new Leisure Centre in Ponteland offers a wide range of indoor leisure opportunities, and the quiet country roads in the county offer excellent cycling and outdoor pursuit opportunities.