

Small Pilgrim Places Journal 21: Holy Trinity Church, Upper Swaledale

The day I was travelling through the high dales of Yorkshire, the wind and rain were severe enough for a planned international bike race to divert to a lower and safer route. The peaks and sheer hillsides of Upper Swaledale, a remote northern region to the east of Richmond, were windswept and sodden that day, with waterfalls pounding, becks breaking their banks and valley roads flooding. So it was a relief to reach the centre of the village of Low Row and to order a hot soup and coffee at the local seventeenth century pub, The Punch Bowl, before visiting my destination, the church next door.



Holy Trinity, one of four Anglican churches in the Parish of Swaledale with Arkengarthdale, perches on a shelf of high ground with far-reaching views across the valley. Standing at the south door above a series of stone steps, I had to pause and admire what must be one of the finest views to be enjoyed when heading home after a service. The stepped path runs downhill to a lychgate and the road, and opposite, at eye level, is a patchwork of small, hedged fields leading up to the high moors on the horizon.

The building, known as Melbecks ("between the becks", from the Old Norse) dates from 1840 and is strikingly simple, both outside and within. In the small entrance lobby the visitor is greeted with a table

laden with kettle, cups and refreshments, all invitingly displayed. Entering the nave, featuring a pale stone pulpit and white walls, I was struck by the neatness of the interior, with light pouring in from its clear windows.

Near the pulpit is an area comfortable chairs set aside for private prayer, and at the back of the nave is a children's corner where I found information on three interesting projects. One was the renovation of the original 1911 pipe organ. Another was



an account of recent restoration works to the windows. The third, told in a series of photos and captions, was the story of a beloved beech tree which used to stand near the church, but which had to be felled. Parishioners missed its presence, but new life began for the beech when a craftsman used its timber to make a beautiful new altar and altar rail - and with the little piece of remaining wood he managed to provide two holders for the altar candles. They all make a beautiful focus in this otherwise unornamented church.



These three albums, and the orderliness of the whole interior, witnessed to the love and respect in which this small church is held at the heart of the local community.

Ali Green