

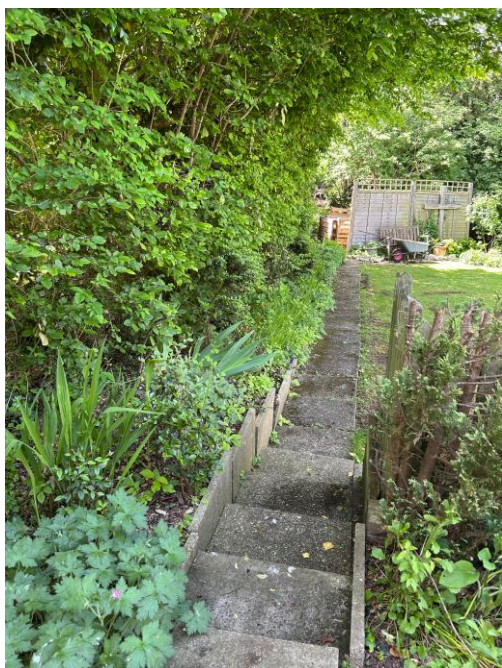
Small Pilgrim Places Journal 74: Thornborough Methodist Church Garden, Buckinghamshire

Thornborough Methodist Church, built of red brick in 1903, stands in the centre of a quiet rural village about three and a half miles from Buckingham. Set back from the road by a wide grass verge, the front gate opens onto a small forecourt and a porch. A narrow passage to the side of the building took me down to the back of the church and a garden which is a Small Pilgrim Place.

Here I found a man sitting on a pew by the back wall, lawnmower and strimmer nearby. He introduced himself as Les Davis, the church secretary, for whom tidying the garden is a regular weekly routine. Les told me that he has lived in the village for 38 years, and remarked on the farmland surrounding the village. Nowadays, the surrounding fields are mostly down to sheep and arable. Not far away, Pilch Field, comprising historic ridge-and-furrow meadows and fen, is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest and managed by the regional Wildlife Trust.



As we talked we were joined by hospitaller Amanda Hodges, who lives in the farmhouse next to Pilch Field. I learnt that the ground behind the church was once used as allotments, but these fell into disuse about 20 years ago. Church members then decided to extend the building into the old allotment area, in order to provide space for meetings and a refreshment area, and to create a garden on the remaining ground. It is made up largely of a lawn surrounded by herbaceous beds, running gently down to a small stream. On the further bank a row of tall poplar trees provides an attractive backdrop. The extension and the garden together have proved to be a great asset for the local community, allowing for a variety of events and projects.



A weekly morning drop-in offers an opportunity for a chat and drinks. Once a month there is a lunch club open to anyone in the village to enjoy a two course meal followed by a short quiz over tea and coffee. Lyrics and Lunch is an initiative for those with dementia and their carers, and includes music, singing and a meal. From the dining and seating area of the new extension a good view of the garden can

be enjoyed. The garden is available for all these groups, and indoor and outdoor space is also available to hire for other community events.

During my visit I heard that a village sports day had just taken place. Tea and cakes were provided by the church, with tables and chairs (usually stored in the garden shed) set out on the lawn. As the summer months approach, a gazebo is erected to provide a shady area from the sun or shelter from showers. Against the back wall of the church stand two pews, saved from when church members installed new chairs in the worship space, and now providing a useful resting place for visitors. On the exterior wall is a box filled with SPPN leaflets and resources for visitors to the garden use for reflection and prayer. People often come by to spend a little quiet time in solitude.



I can understand what a difference the extension and garden have made for local people; as Amanda said, both these spaces are “hugely valuable and much appreciated”.