

The Tebay and Orton Local Distinctiveness Project, delivered by ACTion with Communities in Cumbria (ACT), worked with the communities of Tebay and Orton to provide training, events, and raise awareness of, and pride in, cultural and environmental heritage.

St James Tebay, known as 'The Railway Church' was consecrated in 1880. Tebay station was once a prosperous railway junction bringing hundreds of workers to the area. The North Eastern Railway provided land on which the church was built, to serve their spiritual needs. It was hewn from local Shap granite with railway themed interior features.

## Background

With falling congregational numbers and rising heating and maintenance costs, St James Church was at risk of closure. The local history group joined forces with Tebay Primary School to produce the 'Tebay in Steam' exhibition, which followed the lives of local people, examined the history of the church, and the impact of railways on Tebay.

Following the exhibition's success local parishioners felt it was essential to encourage people to visit and become involved in church activities. Problems with damp and a broken window meant there was also an need for essential maintenance.

## The Project

The 'Friends of Tebay Church' group was established, with support from ACT and Churches Trust for Cumbria. It is a non-religious group, open to anyone who has an interest in ensuring this historically and architecturally important building is maintained and continues to flourish as a community hub.

The group have worked in partnership with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) to develop the circular vestry room, directly below the baptistery, to create a new community meeting space. One of the options being explored by the group is to provide a library hub as the library bus serving the area is due to be phased out.



*St James Church, Tebay*

## What has been achieved?

Churches Trust for Cumbria held a 'reviewing your visitor welcome' event at the church which enabled the group to see the building with a fresh, critical eye. Whilst making plans for the vestry refurbishment, the Friends group also launched into a programme of building maintenance.

They repaired windows where bats and birds were flying in, replaced old signs, removed outdated items from the notice board, polished the woodwork and cleaned through the interior of the building. The exterior was also improved by replacing the louvres in the church tower to prevent rain pouring in, and power-washed moss from the church roof.

Safety aspects were also reviewed; exit signs and fire extinguishers have been installed, and in the stairwell lighting has been improved, a hand rail added, and the step edges highlighted with white paint.



*The vestry room, before work started*



*The vestry room transformed into 'The Hub'*

Following an ACT 'fit for funding' workshop, the group successfully applied for funds to develop the vestry and install new facilities.

Funding came from: The Churches Trust for Cumbria; Cumbria Waste Management Environment Management Trust; Tebay Parish Council; the Dioceses of Carlisle; and Community Funds from Eden District Council and the Staff of Westmorland Ltd.

Adjacent to the circular vestry room was an old boiler room. This was cleared, the floor levelled, and asbestos removed so it can be re-designated as a toilet and kitchen area.

The vestry room was also cleared, re-plastered and painted ready for use as 'The Hub' community facility. The group continues to seek funding to provide other facilities and furnishings.

ACT also supported the group to produce a church heritage guide. This gives information about the internal architectural features of the church, the railway heritage, and details of external features; such as the architecture of the building, the wild flowers growing in the church yard, and some of the notable people buried there.

## The Learning

- There are a lot of people in the group with different skills and it is important to tailor jobs to those skills
- Seek assistance from professional organisations offering help
- Don't be afraid to work in partnership with other organisations to achieve your goals
- Explore all the options you can for community involvement
- Advertise and report each achievement of the project, the more people know about it the more they will support it.

## Contact Details

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The Arthur Rank Centre has information on supporting churches and the use of church buildings: [www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/publications-and-resources/rural-church-buildings#index](http://www.arthurrankcentre.org.uk/publications-and-resources/rural-church-buildings#index)



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