

# Whittingham with Edlingham & Bolton Chapel

## Annual Report for 2025

The year 2025 has been a year of steady encouragement for the parish of Whittingham with Edlingham and Bolton Chapel. As a small rural parish we are very aware of the challenges facing village churches across the country: changing patterns of attendance, rising building costs, and the pressures that come with maintaining historic buildings. Yet throughout the year we have also seen many signs of hope, generosity and community spirit. Through worship, service to the community, careful stewardship of our buildings and finances, and the faithful work of volunteers, the life of our parish has continued to grow and develop.

At the heart of our parish life remains our worship. Regular services have continued at St Bartholomew's, alongside services at St John the Baptist in Edlingham and occasional services at Bolton Chapel. While attendance at the regular Sunday service in Whittingham remains modest, the PCC has reflected carefully on how we might better serve the parish and connect with the wider community. Special services such as Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance continue to draw strong attendance, reminding us that the church remains deeply valued by the village community even when weekly attendance fluctuates.

Our connection with **Whittingham Church of England Primary School** has also remained a vital part of parish life. The school continues to bring energy and joy into the church building through services and collective worship. Events such as the Year 6 Leavers' Service bring together families, staff and parishioners in celebration and thanksgiving for the children's time at the school. The rhythms of the school year continue to be an important bridge between church and community.

During the year we also launched new initiatives to strengthen this connection. One particularly encouraging project has been the appeal to provide Bibles for children in Key Stage 2 at the school. Parishioners responded generously, contributing over £600 toward the cost, demonstrating once again the strong commitment in the village to supporting the spiritual life of its young people.

Another exciting development has been the introduction of **Toddly Play**, a simple act of worship designed for pre-school children and their parents. Although this began in Felton, the hope is to build similar connections across our parishes and involve families linked to Whittingham School. Toddly Play represents an important part of our vision for the future: welcoming young families and offering accessible ways for them to engage with church life.

Communication and outreach have also been areas of focus for the PCC this year. With the help of our administrator earlier in the year, efforts were made to improve communication through local publications, social media and parish networks. Increasing awareness of church events and services remains an important priority if we are to strengthen our relationship with the wider village community.

Our parish buildings continue to play a vital role in the life of the community, and 2025 has involved significant attention to their care and maintenance.

At **St Bartholomew's, Whittingham**, a number of improvements were made during the year. A new water boiler has been installed and heating issues addressed, helping to make the church more comfortable and welcoming for worship and events. However, the Quinquennial Inspection has highlighted significant repair work that will eventually need to be undertaken, particularly relating to the stonework and windows. Early estimates suggest that the cost of these repairs could be substantial, and we will need to explore grant funding and other support in the coming years to ensure that this historic building can continue to serve the parish well.

Meanwhile at **St John the Baptist, Edlingham**, 2025 saw major progress on the Gateway Project. This project addresses long-standing flooding issues affecting the churchyard entrance and seeks to improve accessibility for visitors and worshippers alike. The plan includes relocating the gate to higher ground and installing a resin-bonded path through the churchyard, making the church far more accessible, particularly for wheelchair users.

This work has only been possible thanks to the success of grant applications and the dedication of volunteers who have helped bring the project forward. It is a wonderful example of how partnership between the parish, local authorities and funding bodies can help preserve and enhance our historic churches.

**Bolton Chapel** continues to host occasional services and special events. Its historic setting provides a unique place for worship and gathering, and it remains an important part of our parish heritage.

Financial stewardship has been a major theme during the year. At the start of 2025 the parish finances were still fragile, and the PCC had to approach expenditure with care. However, through careful management and with the addition of contactless giving terminals, our financial position improved over the course of the year.

An encouraging development has been our ability **to pay our Parish Share in full for the first time in many years**. This is an important achievement.

The Parish Share is often misunderstood as simply a “bill” sent by the Diocese. In reality it is our contribution to the shared mission of the Church of England across the Diocese of Newcastle. It helps fund clergy stipends, training for ministers, safeguarding work, and the many ministries that support parishes across the region. By paying our Parish Share in full we are playing our part in sustaining the wider life of the Church, ensuring that ministry continues not only here in Whittingham but across the whole diocese.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that the Diocese and associated partners have also supported our local ministry in very tangible ways. During the year the parish received **nearly £20,000 in funding support**, particularly through grants connected with the Edlingham Gateway Project and support for Toddly Play and related community initiatives.

These funds demonstrate the mutual nature of our relationship with the wider Church. While we contribute through our Parish Share, the Diocese also supports local projects that help churches serve their communities more effectively.

Fundraising and community events have also played an important role in parish life this year. Our delayed Christmas Coffee Morning early in the year was a tremendous success, raising over £1,000 and bringing together a large number of villagers for a joyful community event.

Music has also enriched parish life. Concerts by the Coquetdale Choir at both Whittingham and Edlingham were well attended and provided opportunities for the church buildings to be used as cultural as well as spiritual spaces.

It is worth pointing out that our finances, though improved, are still precarious. The best way to support our church is through regular monthly giving through the Parish Giving Scheme, and I would like to encourage those who love the church within their community to do this. <https://www.paritygiving.org.uk/donors/find-your-parish/whittingham-st-bartholomew-alnwick?set=true>

We have also seen the church remain present in the important moments of village life. Church bells have rung for weddings and funerals, for school celebrations, and for moments of remembrance and thanksgiving in the community. These moments remind us that the church continues to stand at the heart of village life, marking the milestones of people’s lives and offering a place of prayer, reflection and hope.

Behind all of this activity stands the faithful work of many volunteers. The PCC would like to thank everyone who contributes to the life of the parish: those who clean the churches, maintain the churchyards, ring the bells, arrange flowers, prepare services, organise events, and quietly support the work of the church in countless ways. Special thanks must also go to those who serve on the PCC and give their time to the governance and stewardship of the parish.

As we look ahead to 2026, we do so with both realism and hope. We know that there are challenges ahead, particularly regarding the maintenance of our historic buildings and the need to deepen engagement with the wider community. Yet we also know that God continues to work through this parish and through the people who serve it.

Whittingham church has stood at the heart of the village for centuries, and throughout 2025 it has continued to be a place of worship, welcome and community. With prayer, generosity and continued partnership, we trust that the year ahead will bring new opportunities to share the love of Christ with all who live in and visit our parish.

In faith, hope and love,

Your Vicar

Rev'd Rich Townend