

# Prayer Book in use at . . . Aisholt

Michael Cansdale

All Saints' Aisholt is a tiny, 15th-Century church, beautifully situated in a valley of the Quantock Hills a few miles north of Taunton. The church clings to a hillside so steep that the belfry is level with the top of the churchyard. It is an outstanding centre for walks.

It has many historic connections: for example, the old schoolroom next door was the home of the Victorian poet, Sir Henry Newbolt; and Coleridge and Wordsworth knew it well when they lived nearby. A previous vicar of both Aisholt and Over Stowey was the Revd William Holland, and his diary of the period, the early 1800s, is well worth reading—'Paupers and Pig-killers'.

Aisholt is one of the very small number of 'thankful churches' in the country—in which every parishioner serving in the First World War returned safely.

For many years its PCC has chosen to use only the BCP for all services, which are held every Sunday throughout the year, at 11 a.m.—Holy Communion the first Sunday in the month, and otherwise Sung Matins. There is a small but dedicated congregation, albeit mostly elderly, augmented by worshippers from further afield, and visitors.

How has it managed to survive and keep its independence? When asked, members of the congregation had these comments to make:

- 'The BCP is what keeps our services alive. I always know where I am with the words and the form of service. I don't need to follow words in a book or booklet—they are just "part of me" now.'
- 'We have a very varied congregation both in age and in churchmanship, but the common bond

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is our love of traditional worship and our respect for different theological and denominational backgrounds.'

- 'We love singing the Canticles. Where else nowadays could I enjoy the Venite and Te Deum or Jubilate at Matins in a tiny village church, as opposed to a cathedral? And even though we don't sing the Psalms, we know that every week there will be the appointed Psalm to read together.'
- 'Our organists coax life out of the small organ, and the hymn singing (from *A & M Revised*) is so enthusiastic!'
- 'The congregation is small but friendly. There is always a warm welcome for visitors or more occasional members. And for special occasions like Harvest or Remembrance.'
- 'It is so peaceful. You are undisturbed by traffic noise; just the clip-clop of riders passing. And in summer the main sound is that of the bees, which unfortunately built their nest in the chancel! My wife and I want to be buried in the churchyard, along with our friends.'

Of course, as a small and elderly congregation, in an isolated church, with few local families, we

have no easy answers for the future. Fortunately our Rector and the other clergy are sympathetic. We are one of six churches, and those wanting a different kind of service can find what they are looking for elsewhere in the benefice.

The fabric of the church is in good order, and there is strong financial and personal support from The Friends of Aisholt Church, a separate registered charity. The church and the Friends have an excellent website ([www.aisholt.org](http://www.aisholt.org)) which attracts visitors. The leader of an American choir recently saw our website and has said that they will come and sing a special service for us in July, 2011, before going on the next day for the Eucharist in Wells Cathedral!

At least we are no longer under threat of closure, as we were some years ago, and we reckon that we owe our continued existence in large measure to our emphasis on the BCP, and our corporate membership of the Prayer Book Society, which we greatly value. If you live nearby, or are down in the West Country on holiday, come and worship with us one Sunday morning, and then have a walk afterwards!

*Michael Camdale is a member of the Bath & Wells Branch of the Prayer Book Society, and Churchwarden of All Saints Church Aisholt.*