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A PLACE TO BELONG?

THE CHANGING PLACE OF CHURCH IN RURAL LIFE

A thesis submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

Declaration Form

1. This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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2. This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of: **MA Engaged Anthropology**

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ABSTRACT

Many church buildings are finding a new lease of life as multi-functional public spaces. Alongside their traditional role as places of worship, 'sacred space' is being opened-up to new purposes by local communities and therefore to a reinterpretation of 'place'. Consequently, in a diverse and plural society, such places may come to mean different things to different people. Viewed from the multiple perspectives of those who encounter their parish church in different ways, this short ethnographic case study explores the process of belonging within a hermeneutic framework. By listening to people talk about their emplaced experiences, I examine how place-related meanings and identities interact to construct participant's sense of place. The analysis of the narratives offered by participants brings into sharp focus important themes of authenticity, alterity, continuity and change in rural life. I argue that the inevitable tensions aroused by the multivocality of place must be expressed in a 'dialogic space' of mutual recognition. Through conversation and story-telling, discursive differences can be harmonised in new, creative understandings of 'place' as an ongoing story. It is not without its challenges. But this ethnographic study of 'placeness' and place-making suggests a bright future can be secured for multi-purposed church-buildings at the heart of rural village.

INTRODUCTION

A medieval parish church is a familiar sight in the rural British landscape. We all recognise *what* it is. We may also agree what it *means*. But, increasingly, church buildings are finding a new lease of life as multi-functional public spaces. As a result, alongside their traditional role as places of worship, sacred spaces are increasingly open to new interpretations. This short ethnographic study explores the meaning and identity of a rural church from the perspective of those who encounter this particular place in different ways. By listening to how people talk about their parish church, I shall endeavour to discover the many ways people find they can belong.

WHEN IS A CHURCH NOT A CHURCH?

St Peter's is the parish church of Peterchurch, a village at the heart of Herefordshire's Golden Valley close to the Welsh border. A small, largely elderly, congregation of 15 to 20 faithful regularly meet to worship there on Sundays. The building has undergone many significant changes over the centuries, not least in the last eight years. Significant investment to modernise the internal space in 2009 coincided with its designation as a "Children's Centre". This innovative arrangement, under the terms of a license agreement with Herefordshire Council, enabled 'Sure Start' children's services to be delivered in a rurally deprived area. At the same time, Herefordshire Libraries installed a small but fully-fledged public library in the bell-ringing chamber, run by local volunteers. The building was renamed St Peter's Centre and, with Big Lottery funding secured, a small part-time staff team employed by the Parochial Church Council ('PCC') to expand the community use of its newly multi-functional space. In 2013, the PCC registered with the Charity Commission, declaring its charitable aims as the delivery of both religious and community services. Over the course of 2016 a fresh-round of grant funding was secured to further develop St Peter's as a vibrant community hub. Renamed "The Hub", its latest incarnation was heralded by a colourful new logo featuring a tree motif, recalling the ancient Yew in the churchyard: a symbol of life, growth and longevity. The most conspicuous development to follow was the opening of a community café in St Peter's in January 2017.

As a result of the internal re-ordering and subsequent community project, the traditional practice of Christian worship and the communal marking of rites of passage now take place in a space occupied at other times by a café and yoga classes. How then do these different 'users' understand the space? More broadly, as a place, does St Peter's now *mean* different things to *different* people? Or, is the meaning of a church simply a socio-cultural 'given', a socially-produced public space whose recognisable physicality insures that its meaning is immutably fixed in our collective understanding?

THE LITERATURE

The Oxford reference dictionary defines "church" as: *"1. A building for public worship; 2. A meeting for public worship in such a building; 3. The body of all Christians; 4. The clergy or clerical profession; 5. An organised Christian group or society; 6. Institutionalised religion as a political or social force."* In terms of its reference, the word 'church' is polysemic, its semantic meaning resolved only by the context in which it is used. What concerns us here, however, is the pragmatic sense of meaning, a social meaning which depends on how the term is used in a community of practice. The social meaning of place occupies a central role in theories of space and place. A *place* can be described as a meaningful *space;* a space to which meaning has been ascribed (see Creswell 2015, Low 2017). We develop multifaceted relationships with places that sometimes transcend physical boundaries; adding layers of meaning from repeated use or from a singular significant experience (Manzo 2005). Anthropologist, Setha Low, argues that people form attachments to places when their experience of a space is transformed into a "culturally meaningful and shared symbol, that is, a place" (Low 1992: 166). Place meanings can be created, cultivated and modified "through stories, myths, literature, promotional materials, folklore, paintings, music, films, history, casual conversations, and memory; or through organised activities such as community arts events or walks and talks" (Kudryavtsev et al. 2012: 238). As we shall see, according to this account, St Peter's is indeed a meaningful space for many of its participants. But not inevitably so.

THE MEANINGS OF PLACE

Place meanings are thought to supply reasons for the emotional *attachments* people form with their social and physical environments (Altman & Low 1992, Hernandez et al. 2014, Kudryavtsev et. al. 2012, Lewicka 2011, Manzo & Devine-Wright 2014, Raymond et. al. 2010, Scannell & Gifford 2010). Environmental psychologists have shown that people become connected to particular places over time through the accumulation of memories and by habituated routines (Brown & Perkins 1992, Lewicka 2014). Those

that form place attachments often have stronger social bonds and neighbourhood ties, watch out for one another, and participate more fully in community life (Brown et al. 2003, Lewicka 2005, 2011, Manzo & Perkins 2006, Mihaylov & Perkins 2014, Perkins & Long 2002). Together, meaning and attachment constitute a *sense of place* closely associated with community, personal memory and the self (Jorgensen & Stedman 2001, Kudryavtsev et. al. 2012, Relph 2008). It may be experienced, for example, where local heritage fosters local pride, volunteerism, and promotes communal wellbeing (Murzyn-Kupisz & Dzialek 2013).

The view that place is simply a meaningful space is however disputed. Drawing on the existential phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, Casey (1996) insists our embodied being-in-the-world is necessarily prior to any conception we can have of space. Thus, "the living-moving body is essential to the process of emplacement: lived bodies belong to places and help constitute them" (1996: 24). A more pertinent distinction, therefore, is between 'place' and its opposite. Anthropologist Marc Augé suggests places are associated with historical memories and are able to sustain meaningful social life. Consequently, "non-places" are ephemeral, transitory places rather than places of habitation and communal significance (Augé 2008). Relph argues that 'placelessness' is an attitude of inauthenticity "for it involves no awareness of the deep and symbolic significances of places and no appreciation of their identities." (1976 [2008]: 82). The 'placeness' of a 'church' like St Peter's therefore depends on people's attitudes, awareness, appreciation and the significations they attach or recognise in it. Whether it is a place rather than a non-place - or indeed a mere space – depends on the relationship people form with it.

SOURCES OF MEANING

A parish church is of course a very specific kind of place. The place concepts employed and established empirically in other places may or may not apply. Equally, since a 'church' corresponds to a particular constellation of social and cultural practices, symbols and meanings, an exploration of its 'placeness' may reveal new understandings generalizable to other people-place contexts. Social scientists have offered alternative accounts of how and why a place becomes meaningful to people:

PLACE AS EXPERIENCED

The first considers place phenomenologically as the embodied, lived experience of being-in-the-world. We understand place implicitly through our practical engagement in localised lifeworlds (Buttimer & Seamon 1980, Ingold 2000, Relph 1976, Seamon 1979). In this vein, Relph (1976) says *existential* insideness occurs "when a place is experienced without deliberate and selfconscious reflection yet is full with significances". (1976 [2008]: 55). Unlike outsiders who experience places *only* as objects of understanding, an *authentic* sense of place is a direct experience of an insider who knows he *belongs* without reflecting upon it (1976, emphasis added). This unmediated being-in place is nonetheless conditioned by a background of cultural practices and social institutions that pervade our perceptions of place. Consequently, the dialectic of perception and place is always sense-making but implicit understandings may be made explicit through our interpretations of emplaced experiences (Casey 1996).

PLACE AS CONSTRUCTED

The second approach foregrounds the social and cultural horizons that shape our perception of place. Places are socially produced or constructed through social, political, cultural, historical or other intersubjective or discursive processes (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Low 2017). While experience of place may be understood extra-linguistically, *shared* meanings are "interpreted from particular social positions and for particular social reasons". Consequently, "senses of place are articulated through processes of representation" (Rose 1995: 89). Some social scientists argue strongly that constructions of both 'place' and 'community' have undesirable social implications. They point towards the closedness of these concepts as localised, bounded, abstract or 'imagined' entities that ferment a divisive politics of identity (for example, Anderson 1983, Massey 2005, Young 1990). They also fail to acknowledge the mobility of people and cultural knowledge in a globally interconnected world. Community, like place, is a representation that, Dicks (2000) argues, rely on the drawing of boundaries. Thus, place-making is the construction of difference premised on various forms of exclusion and otherness (Ferguson and Gupta 1997). The veracity of an idealised Christian "community" has also been called into question by theologians for whom

ethnographies of local congregations reveal considerable differences, rather than assumed commonalities (Healey 2012).

PLACE AS STORY

Anthropologists have employed both approaches above or else advocated mixed methods of inquiry (Low & Lawrence-Zuniga 2003, Low 2017). Their contributions to the place and space literature have attempted to unify the two perspectives on place as both "experience and symbol" (Richardson 1984), overcoming a tension "between phenomenological and hermeneutic positions in social theory" (Feld & Basso 1996: 8). According to Miles Richardson, place "grows out of experience and it, in turn, symbolises that experience" (1984: 65). Similarly, "conceptualisation, reflection and representation tend to follow from our actions" (Jackson 2005: xv). Place may therefore be understood as a narrative-like synthesis of the subjective-experiential view and the objective-transcendent view (Rodman 1992, citing Entrikin 1991). According to Jackson, signification is "a process of transforming lived experiences that are apprehended as private or singularly one's own, into *forms that may be shared*". It is the result of a negotiation of social meaning achieved by "comparing notes, sharing experiences, engaging in conversation, seeing things from various vantage points" (Jackson 2005: xxvii, emphasis in original). Participating subjects can thereby resolve the "phenomenological problem of constructing a shared narrative of place from individually unique experiences" (Rodman 1992: 645).

PLACE AND IDENTITY

In sum, 'place meaning' is informed by the structure of experiences and involvement in social activities (Cuba and Hummon 1993). Thus, people assign meaning to places but also derive meaning in their lives from places (Davenport and Anderson 2005). The theologian Walter Brueggemann asserts the temporal dimension of meaning: "place is space which has historical meanings, where some things have happened which are now remembered, and which provide continuity and identity across generations" (Brueggemann 2002, cited in McGrath 2012: 117). Consequently, repeated and varied

experiences-in-place create bridges to the past, feelings of security and a sense of belonging mediated by socially constructed identities (Manzo 2005). They form a "web of meaning" and complete the gestalt of "who we are" (2005: 76). Place and identity are therefore inextricably bound to one another; co-produced "as people come to identify with where they live, shape it, however modestly, and are in turn shaped by their environments, creating distinctive environmental autobiographies, the narratives we hold from the memories of those spaces and places that shaped us" (Gieseking & Mangold 2014: 73).

Relph (1976) notes that "while every individual may assign selfconsciously or unselfconsciously an identity to particular places, these identities are nevertheless combined intersubjectively to form a common identity" (1976 [2008]: 45). He draws a distinction between the identity *of* a place and the identity that a person or group *has* with a place. The latter is a place identification that encompasses the social identification that expresses one's membership to a group defined by location (Twigger-Ross and Uzell 1996). Place identity, on the other hand, is another aspect that describes a person's socialisation to the physical world (1996). In an early formulation, place identity was defined in broad terms as a "sub-structure of self-identity consisting of memories, ideas, feelings, attitudes, values, preferences, meanings, and conceptions of behaviour and experience that occur in places" (Proshansky 1978, also Proshanky et al. 1983). Twigger-Ross and Uzell (1996) argue that both social identifications and self-identity have place-related implications. Indeed, people choose environments congruent with their self-concept and may move locations accordingly. As bounded locales, places provide "a significant framework in which identity is constructed, maintained and transformed" (Cuba & Hummon 1993: 112). Therefore, more succinctly, place identity is "an interpretation of self that uses environmental meaning to symbolise or situate identity" (1993: 112). By acting as referents to past selves and actions, the maintenance of a link with places also provides a sense of continuity to one's self-identity. Indeed, there is evidence that "having control, or not, over the maintenance of continuity of place is important for psychological well-being" (1996: 208). Reviewing the literature, Dixon and Durrheim (2004) identified four place identity processes: (1) familiarity (including existential, autobiographical insideness); (2)

affective-evaluative (attachment); (3) self-symbolic (individual and collective), including historical referents for continuity and distinctiveness; and (4) appropriation for self-regulating goals, including restorative, emotional-spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic engagement, and self-expression. As a consequence, "loss of place tends to provoke strong social and psychological responses precisely because it entails a loss of self" (2004: 458).

THE SELF AND THE SACRED

There are at least two important further considerations concerning a 'church'. First, as a 'place of worship', St Peter's may be described as a 'sacred space' and, as such, has particular qualities attributed to it (whether symbolically or ontologically). Second, a medieval church building has heritage-related values and meanings which may not be present in other kinds of place. For many, a medieval church building is a significant historical monument.

Research by heritage and tourism scholars has endeavoured to understand what makes our encounter with such places *personally* significant. One notable study suggests that past can be appropriated to find one's "true self", the development of authenticity as an expression of identity, autonomy, individuality, and self-realisation (McIntosh & Prentice 1999). These researchers find that some visitors to heritage sites that are both public symbols and private spaces add personal meanings to their experience. Tourists thereby become "active players in the production of their own 'meaningful environment' and their own experiences of authenticity" (1999: 609). Another influential paper in tourism research has asked what constitutes an authentic experience (Wang 1999). In its object-related form, authentically experienced objects are thought to have a 'constructed' symbolic or 'objective' authenticity. Conversely, an *activity-related* authentic experience is a form of "existential authenticity"; an "existential state of Being" activated in a liminal process (1999: 352). According to this account, existential authenticity is experienced as an expression of a one's 'true self' otherwise lost in the everyday public roles people occupy in modern Western society (1999: 358). While disputing the notion that authenticity can't be achieved in ordinary life, Brown (2012) agrees that it may have a tranquilising effect. Tourism therefore

creates a space, or a "'playroom' for reflection on one's life that may act as a catalyst to a more authentic way of living" (2012: 184). Developing the idea of authentic experience, Zhu (2012) proposes that authenticity is *performative*. As an unconscious embodied practice, *performative authenticity* dynamically connects the field (objectivity) and habitus (subjectivity), blurring the boundaries between purposive and unreflective practice (2012). Rickly-Boyd (2013) concurs that "understandings of place as lived experience have taken a 'performative turn' so as to incorporate agency, identities and contestation" (2013: 2). Place, she suggests, "is made through performance by a set of discourses and texts, bodies and objects, affects and percepts, technologies and mediums" and is *authenticated* by our emotional, affective and sensuous relatedness to it (2013: 2, emphasis added). Healy (2012) also makes an appeal to authenticity in the congregational life of a local church. Referring to Taylor's (1991) account of authenticity as an acceptable moral ideal, Healy argues in favour of the Christian's "quest to live authentically in conformity to a larger whole" (2012: 196). The traditions and practices of the church are, he says, a Christian expression and embodiment of the world. Its distinctiveness lies "in its members' quest to live authentically within the world" (2012: 197).

Together these studies suggest that personally significant places resonate with our senses affectively and emotionally as well as with our constructed self-concept in the context of our lives as a whole. As both a church and community hub, St Peter's is a setting or stage for both the ritual performance of Christian worship and the practices of everyday life: the sacred and mundane. According to David Chidester and Edward Linenthal (1995), a sacred place is not merely a meaningful place, it is appropriated, possessed and owned" (1995: 8). They describe two alternative accounts of the production of sacred space. The 'substantive' account, closely associated with Mircea Eliade, views the sacred as an 'ontological' category (Lane 2002); an inherent quality as the result of an "irruption" of the Divine (Eliade 1957). Consequently, sacred space cannot be built, only discovered; it may be entered into but not necessarily perceived as such (2002). Ordinary space may be set apart by spatial practices that have been transformed by religious meanings (Knott 2004). However, according to a 'situational' account, the sacred is a by-product of a cultural work of sacralisation; sacred space

reproduced through processes of both 'ritualisation' and 'reinterpretation'. Consequently, they suggest, sacred space is an inevitably *contested* space; a site of "negotiated contests over the legitimate ownership of sacred symbols" (1995: 15).

In a traditional medieval church like St Peter's, liturgical space is set apart and configured to facilitate the rite of the Eucharist. However, the necessity of a strict spatial segregation of space has been challenged both theologically and historically. Since the performance of the rite signifies the incarnation, it symbolises God overcoming a dualism of the material and spiritual, or the profane and sacred spheres of existence (Sheehy 2007). Nevertheless, a view subsequently emerged in the nineteenth century that "if the Christian community was to perform any social service requiring rooms, the accommodation had to be provided *outside* the liturgical area" (Tavinor 2007: 40). According to one Anglican priest in Herefordshire, "we in the Church of England have taken a long time to free ourselves of this tyranny" (2007: 40, emphasis in original).

Places are perceived through our participation in space and time. Indeed, "places participate in the perception that is made of them" (Lane 2002: 44). We perceive places through habitation or 'dwelling'; our life-histories interwoven through the shared experience of inhabiting particular places and following particular paths (Ingold 2000). Participation is the bodily *habitus* of an agent conditioned by social forces (Bourdieu 1990). The everyday routines, rituals and habits are also the subversive 'tactics' (De Certeau 1988) by which we *appropriate* familiar places. We acquire a history, shared with others, and accumulate personal memories. For Paul Ricoeur (1966: 14 cited by Simms 2003) existence is a unity of the subjective and objective, requiring that "I participate actively in my incarnation". Similarly, Gadamer writes that "understanding is to be thought of less as a subjective act than as participating in an event of tradition, a process of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated" (Gadamer 1975: 290). Thus, we may assert that place participation is embodied existence in particular spatial-temporal and historical contexts. It is through participation that we interpret and represent our place-related meanings and identities.

A range of place-related concepts have been proposed in the interdisciplinary literature on space and place. Many of these have been defined empirically by environmental psychologists employing quantitative research methods. Amongst these, the concept of 'place attachment' has been primary. Instead, I want to explore the interaction of two of these concepts – place meaning and place identity - in a narrative ethnography. This is a suitable approach if place meanings are constructed from experiences re-told in narrative discourse. A narrative inquiry is particularly relevant if place identity represents a coherent self-concept unified by memories and autobiography (Clandinin & Connelly 2000, Linde 1993, Riessman 2008, Tedlock 1991). As illustrated heuristically in Figure 1, a 'church' offers a unique context to discover how people make sense of a place through different modes of participation that may have both 'place-making' and 'self-making' dimensions (Bruner 1991, Schneekloth & Shibley 1995). By listening to the multiple voices and stories of place-participants, my aim is to discover how different people 'belong' at St Peter's, Peterchurch.
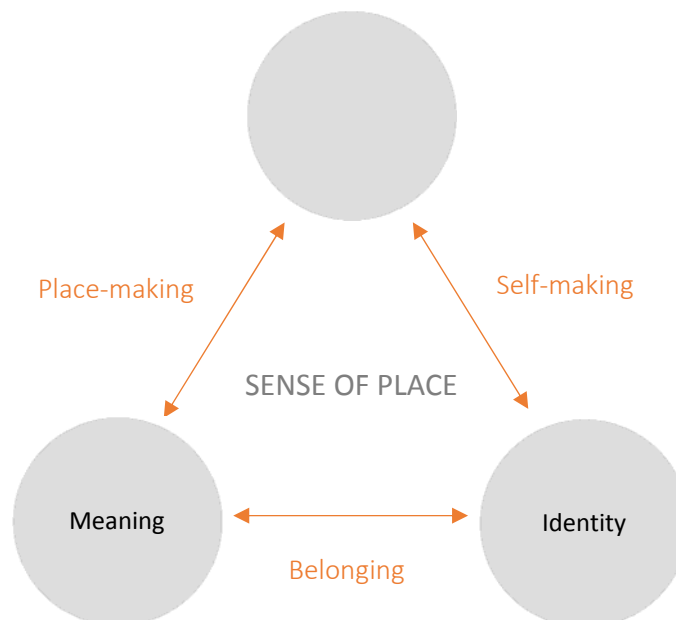

FIGURE 1: DIALECTICS OF PLACE, KEY CONCEPTS (SOURCE: AUTHOR)

AN OUTSIDER 'AT-HOME'

The research for a mini-ethnography was undertaken over an eighteen-month period between October 2016 and February 2018. As a local resident, however, my involvement with the church and community project began somewhat earlier. Following an invitation from Simon, the vicar of St Peter's, I assumed towards the end of 2015 a voluntary role assisting with the 'project development'. In many ways, this was a stage in my own personal journey of understanding an unfamiliar place. I had arrived in the village with my wife and family only four years earlier. Having lived previously in the home counties within easy commuting distance to central London, we were making a slow but steady adjustment to a more rural way of life. The invitation to help at St Peter's was a good way for us to get to know people and feel part of the local community. In my new role I participated in management meetings, joined the Peterchurch Parochial Church Council, and convened a temporary steering group of other local residents. The receipt of initial funding for a twelve-month pilot project for "the Hub" in October 2016 marked the start of a more self-consciously anthropological interest in St Peter's as the context for an anthropological study.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Following my initial participation as an 'insider' in the project, the fieldwork proceeded in two stages. The first beginning in October 2016 consisted in an ongoing period of participant observation as an 'engaged' student anthropologist. As a member of the PCC and project team, I was able to continue to participate fully in conversations, discussions and events in the unfolding project. During this period, I began to organise and summarise my notes thematically with reference to place concepts, annotating them with theoretical and analytical commentary. As well as coding for the general themes – meaning, identity and participation - I identified additional subthemes such as: spatial segregation; contestation; alienation; authority and legitimacy; and exchange relations. From an initial list of topical themes, I selected a sub-set for which I intended to collect further data during the next stage of fieldwork.

INTERVIEWS

The second stage of fieldwork began in December 2017 with the collection of narrative data. This took two forms. First, transcripts were made from follow-up interviews conducted with four key participants. Interviewees were selected with reference to the key themes identified from the previous participant-observations. The selected research participants were co-participants (Tedlock 1991) who could offer quite different perspectives on their own participation at St Peter's. These interviews were largely unstructured, although I prepared four to five open-ended questions that related to the specific themes I wanted to explore with each. Over the course of an hour-long interview, I invited each interviewee to reflect upon or resume earlier conversations. I was very conscious throughout of my close association with the Hub project. Before each interview, I explained carefully to participants my new role as a researcher and invited them to feel free to share openly and honestly.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Written 'feedback' was also gathered from two other groups of participants at St Peter's I shall call 'users' and 'volunteers'. Data from the first group was gathered on A5 cards designed to look like a postcard traditionally sent home from a holiday (see Figure 2). It invited users to share a brief description of their experience at St Peter's, with a prompt to explain "what this place means to you". A total of 83 responses were received and subsequently analysed.

Feedback from 17 active volunteers with the community project was gathered separately using a simple semi-structured questionnaire with two questions printed on two A4 sheets. For each of the four questions there was a large text box for responses:

1. Why did you decide to volunteer at St Peter's Centre?
2. What has been your experience of volunteering at St Peter's Centre?
3. What does St Peter's Centre mean to you?
4. What difference has it made?

The questions asked of respondents were intended to reveal a discourse that disclosed participant's interpretation of St Peter's. I did not expect place meaning and significances to be fully transparent in the discourse itself. Consequently, I conducted a discourse analysis of the written responses and interview transcripts to identify

additional subthemes and to explore the connections between them. The frequency with which key words were used in the written responses from users and volunteers also enabled prominent discursive themes to be identified. After the transcripts had been coded by theme/sub-theme and interpretive notes added, they were re-compiled thematically.

STRUCTURE OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

Extracts from the interviews were then selectively assembled into a narrative ethnography. The account that follows begins with three 'vignettes' that reveal the most important themes identified from the data with respect to place meanings and identities. I have drawn heavily on field notes and interview transcripts in these opening sections to allow the voices of co-participants to be heard. The sections that follow explore related sub-themes, adding additional layers of interpretive analysis. A discussion section draws together an analysis of the key discursive themes.
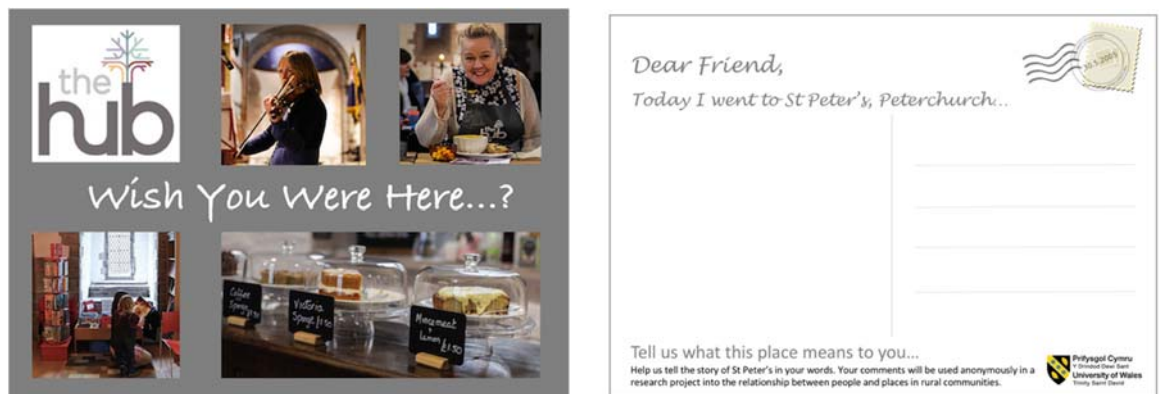

FIGURE 2: A5-SIZED USER FEEDBACK 'POSTCARD'

(Source: Author)

THREE VIGNETTES

I. BUT THIS IS A CHURCH!

Sitting together around an arrangement of folding red tables one evening at St Peter's, a question is brought before the gathered members of the Parochial Church Council ('PCC'). Where could space be found within the building for the installation of a coffee shop and office space for two part-time staff members? Simon, as Chairman, makes a startling suggestion: could a coffee shop could be situated in the chancel? The proposed site was precisely where the congregation met for Sunday worship, chairs permanently arranged in this space for this purpose. It is a controversial idea. Bringing community activities into this space would cross an invisible but commonly-accepted boundary between "church" and "centre". Initial exchanges sought to find alternative solutions to both proposals. Eventually, with a note of exasperation, one elderly member of the committee, Maggie, slammed her hand down hard on the table and declared: "but this is a church!". It was a call to order. An appeal to common-sense.

Two years later, after the "The Hub Café" had occupied the chancel for over a year, Maggie and I find time to reflect. Chatting in the kitchen of her modern bungalow as she makes me a coffee, Maggie explains how she came to be in Peterchurch. Her arrival in 2003 was quite literally based on a "pin in the map" decision. Never married, she arrived alone at the age of seventy to start a new life following a fifty-year career as a nanny for a family on a Wiltshire estate. 'Maggie' was the name given to her by the children she used to care for and helped raise to adulthood. It was also the name by which she immediately became known as she was welcomed into the village and the church. After we have settled down in her sunny lounge, I remind Maggie of her outburst during the earlier PCC meeting. "That sounds like me", she chuckles. I wonder if she could she could remember what she was thinking and feeling at the time. In careful and measured tones, she recalls:

MAGGIE: I think it was very much that it was our holy space. It was somewhere that we could go to, facing the altar, and have our prayers and our services and things.

And at that stage - and this is at that stage - I very much felt that any sort of cafe in that part of the church was going to be an awful intrusion into our worship. And that was what was hurting… I know the whole church is a holy space. But that particular area…

Maggie is careful to distance herself from her earlier remarks, suggesting her views have since changed. She goes on to explain why the spatial arrangements for Holy Communion on Sunday were so important.

MAGGIE: I did have to say to Simon, it must have been a few months back now, that I knew that some of the congregation weren't happy if, when we were having communion, we weren't looking at the altar. It didn't hurt me as much as it hurt some of the others. I know [name], for instance, said to me, 'I don't feel right if I'm not kneeling and looking at the altar'.

ANDY: We used to sit in 'a round' as well before the café.

MAGGIE: Yes. Yes. But sometimes, as you say, we pass the communion cup when we were sitting in a round. Simon came 'round and we passed it round, as you know. Although I was happy with it, some of the others weren't. Because it…they didn't feel the individuality, if you like, of being with God at that moment.

IMAGE 1: THE 'HOLY SPACE' BEFORE THE CAFÉ, CHAIRS ARRANGED IN THE 'ROUND'
(Source: personal collection)

Maggie talks movingly of the warm welcome she received at church when she arrived in Peterchurch. Coming from a Brethren background she has adjusted to a different

liturgical tradition and is to content to identify with those who place a significance on "facing the altar". This, she explains, has an "individuality" that is lost when the congregation sits in a circle and the bread and wine circulate among them. Communion is a personal act of devotion. This means that the communal performance of worship has a symbolic form that is not, strictly speaking, social. Consequently, the semi-permanent installation of the weekday Hub Café is cleared from the liturgical space to reclaim it for the Sunday service. Rarely numbering many more than fifteen mostly elderly congregants, social exchanges on Sunday are confined mainly to a short period immediately after the service has finished. Typically, a red, plastic table is unfolded, and chairs arranged around it adjacent to the small kitchen at the far end of the Nave where hot drinks are prepared. After chatting casually over coffee and biscuits for 15-20 minutes or so, most are ready to leave. Some never linger at all after the service has concluded. Simon had spoken often about the possibility of doing a "café church" instead. Maggie notes that there had been much talk on the topic, "but what does it mean?" she asks. Describing the current arrangements for providing coffee and tea next to the kitchen, she wonders whether they weren't already doing "café church". As far as Maggie is concerned, worship and socialising over coffee and cake are quite distinct practices. Unless they are separated in time or space, the conflation of the terms 'Café' and 'Church' is, for her, quite meaningless.

After the weekday Hub Café had been established in the "holy space" for nearly two years, Maggie continued to express lingering concerns in a PCC meeting, suggesting that the "living church" is being "squeezed out". I ask her what she meant by this:

MAGGIE: Well, mainly it's sort of what the church stands for and the place of God in our lives. And I felt at that stage, I think, that everything was being so wrapped up in what was going on with the Hub and everything else that was going on at that stage, that people were tending to forget that the purpose of the church is to worship God. And, not only to worship God, but to have God in our lives. I thought that everyone was so busy talking about the project and everything else that nobody was thinking about where God was in it.

Once again, Maggie holds loosely to her previous remarks. She shifts the conversation naturally from the "Holy Space" to her life as a Christian. For Maggie at least, this is what the "church stands for". She speaks with great sincerity about her prayer life, the

distress she feels at human tragedies reported on news broadcasts and becomes tearful as she wonders how people "cope without God". She thereby ascribes two interwoven meanings to 'church'. One is its common-sense 'given' and taken-for-granted socio-religious meaning as a "place of worship", a sacred space produced by material symbols and religious practice. The second signifies her personal journey of faith, inseparable from the story of her life, that has enabled her to navigate periods of pain and loss that she is happy re-tell in detail. It is the presence of God in believer's lives, symbolised by the liturgical space, she suggests, that makes the church "living".

II. THE MOST SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE

I find a spare seat on the mezzanine level at the back of St Peter's and settle down with two of my children. From here we have a grandstand view of the nave in which over a hundred people were gathering for an evening of live African music. The band has set up in the chancel against the stunning backdrop of the illuminated altar. As we wait expectantly, an elderly gentleman is helped to occupy the seat next to me. After a brief 'hello', he surveys the scene below before turning again to me. "Do you know, has this church been deconsecrated"? Somewhat fearful that he might disapprove of its current purpose (and the beer in my hand), I assure him that a worshipping congregation still met every Sunday. I explain that the evening's entertainment had been organised by the resident community project. His eyes light up as he exclaims that it was "marvellous", promising to make a return visit with friends from his own church.

IMAGE 2: THE AFRICAN BAND SET-UP FACING THE AUDIENCE GATHERING IN THE NAVE
(Source: Personal collection).

Once the music starts, the evening progresses to exuberant singing and dancing by both young and old. Afterwards, looking thoroughly satisfied, the band members tell me that they enjoy performing in rural areas as the audiences are always enthusiastic. The following week, while reflecting in a team-meeting, one of the two paid project staff, Sara, offers some feedback from a friend who came to the concert. It was, she said, "the most spiritual experience he had ever had".

Later Sara tells me that there is "no lack of irony" in her employment at St Peter's. She comes from a long line of vicars and missionaries. Her grandfather was a vicar, her other great grandfather was a missionary. Although she was raised in the Anglican church, she explains that she and the rest of her family stopped attending church when she was thirteen, after her confirmation. Her parents are now Quakers she tells me but "I went on my own spiritual journey". By her early twenties she had her "own spiritual beliefs and ideas about life".

SARA: I tend to think it's all much of a muchness. I don't think any of us differ. If you have a spiritual outlook, all spirituality is belief in a greater power than ourselves that is a force for good. That's all I think we all believe. And the other stuff we can just get bogged down. So, I try not to get too bogged down in it.

I ask if she could explain why she thought her friend had described the concert as a "spiritual experience":

SARA: He was saying it genuinely. I think he was referring to the fact that it was in a church and yet that energy and the kids dancing, and the music and the togetherness created a spiritual experience that he would never have been able to get in a conventional church experience. That somehow the juxtaposition in having something which was just a huge amount of heart and energy which were secular. But just had a lot of people very happy and really enjoying themselves in that building. That's what the conversation was around. The fact that we were in church - and there wasn't an irony in the fact that this was the most spiritual event that he had - it was that...I think it is what speaks to people, isn't it?

ANDY: And you felt the same way about the concert?

SARA: I love African music. African music is a place where...I remember very vividly being in North Namibia, and a person who ran the project asked if I wanted to come to church. I didn't want to go because I didn't think it was my bag. And then I can hear this incredible music carrying across to where we were staying. And I just followed it and went and sat outside and listened to it. And it was really one of those memorable experiences. So maybe that's why African music has such a power over me, I don't know.

I note that Sara had used the word "energy" a few times as she described her early experience of church services and of church buildings as a child. I ask whether this word have a particular meaning for her?

SARA: I think energy means we are not just physical matter. There is a sort of web. A field of energy that surrounds us. And I suppose that's my belief system that there are different energies. That is what the greater thing than us is. It is an energetic frequency I suppose.

ANDY: So that's the spirituality you mention?

SARA: It's a bit more complex than that. That you feel it if you are standing by an ocean. You feel it if you are on a hill. You feel it if you listen to an amazing music. You can feel it if you are with good friends. Or if you are with your family. If you are painting a picture. Those places where you access that energy. And I suppose in a way that's why church services don't access that energy for me. They are not accessing that energy.

ANDY: I suppose other people might use different words or labels for what they are referring to with the word 'energy'?

SARA: They might use Holy Spirit. I think that's what I've heard, people that have had this discussion that I have read. That we can have different words for this energy.

And I think that Holy Spirit is probably what people are trying to get at in the Christian religion. if you were talking about more Eastern ones you might talk about Chakras or you might talk about meridians. Or you might talk about Chi. I think that all cultures have this idea that there's energy outside of ourselves. And we just have different words for it. And we can get bogged down in semantics.

ANDY: But it's something that you feel?

SARA: Yes, it's a feeling. I think that you channel it. I often think that things aren't ours. I don't tend to think that my art is mine… I think that it is very creative. I think that is why creativity is very important for people. Because I think it is a way of accessing that energy. So, I think there are things like being out in nature, creativity including music in that, connecting with people. All those different things are ways to channel those bits of energy.

Contrasting her spirituality with a 'placeless' experience of church as a young person,

she continues:

SARA: My experience was that I found personally that the experience of a church service didn't touch, didn't move me, didn't reach me. It didn't affect me; it wasn't where I was at. I got a greater sense of spirituality going for a walk on a hill. Or looking at the sunset. Or being with friends. I realised I wasn't sensing spirituality through that format. I don't not believe… it just doesn't do it for me. And interestingly for me I always struggled with church buildings. And I remember being a child and going to church really struggling with church buildings. I didn't like them. I didn't like church buildings because I found them quiet, lacking in energy.

IMAGE 3: THE "HEART AND ENERGY" OF A SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE AT THE AFRICAN CONCERT

(Source: personal collection)

Sara's interpretation suggests that her friend had enjoyed an authentic experience at St Peter's during the concert; a performative, rather than object-related authenticity, in a liminal social space (Wang 1999). Sara locates this kind of authentic experience typically outside of church buildings and traditional forms of worship. And yet, at the age of nineteen, standing outside a church in Namibia listening to African worship, she admits: "that had spirituality to me; that had energy. That spoke to me. I could have totally bought into that!"

III. WHO ARE ALL THESE PEOPLE?

A popular event in the weekly calendar of The Hub, the Food Assembly is a sort of farmer's market for locally organic produce that members pre-order online and collect from producer's stalls arranged in the nave at St Peter's. Intended as a family occasion, the Food Assembly features a café and creative activities for children. The launch event had attracted well over two hundred people and featured live blue-grass music to create a festive, celebratory atmosphere. Spotting Bob and Kate at a table listening to the music but looking slightly bemused I sit down to join them.

Bob is an ordained part-time minister in his seventies, a member of the clergy team looking after five parishes, including Peterchurch. He lives with his wife, Kate, in the village. Leaning close to make himself heard above the music, Bob relays Kate's question to me, "who are all these people?" I explain that the project was only hosting the event and that it had been organised by a resident of the village. I speculate that the unfamiliar faces were part of the organiser's social network, perhaps from the nearby Steiner school which has a strong environmental ethos. The conversation continues after the next group Sunday service in the adjacent village. Standing with a biscuit and a cup of coffee in the small space beyond the pews at the back of the church, Bob remarks again on the impressive turn-out at the inaugural Food Assembly. Kate, looking slightly troubled, sounds a note of reservation. "But where's Christ in it?",

she muses before wondering whether we are "losing our spiritual home". Some months later I remind Bob and Kate back of our earlier brief conversation. Kate continues:

KATE: I remember saying to you there was no Christian influence there and I suggested you ask [name] to come with the 'Fair Trade' stuff just to have something a bit more sort of Christian. Had a Christian emphasis on it.

IMAGE 4: DIVERSE PARTICIPANTS AT THE LAUNCH OF THE 'FOOD ASSEMBLY'
(Source: personal collection)

Acknowledging Kate's remark that there is no "Christian influence" at the Food Assembly, I ask whether they felt St Peter's stops being a 'church' while it is functioning as a community space. In response, Kate makes some astute observations about its role in the wider community. It is a role she evidently has some misgivings about:

KATE: Whether you go there or not it still serves a need for people who want to be buried and married and Christened within the village which is very important to them. We can't see it ourselves. You know, they want it there for that. And I say, if you want it for those reasons you should be coming to the church and joining in. But, no, they just see it as…There's one part of the community, isn't there, and your people at the Hub…introducing new people to the church, people who wouldn't come in but they're having a coffee. But they wouldn't even come in on a Sunday or any other day, really.

Kate offers an astute social commentary on the different attitudes towards the church building in the wider village. I note her reference to 'my' people at The Hub but her frustration is directed at a wider constituency. While St Peter's "serves a need" for people to mark important rites of passage in their lives, Kate feels they "should be coming to church and joining-in". She recalls a recent conversation and adds:

KATE: She's not a church-goer. She said, "it means so much to our family or we have so many relatives buried there, you know, and it's just our church and its important in our lives…" And I'm thinking why are you saying all this when you never enter the place except for funerals, weddings and Christenings? You know, it's strange, isn't it? I've never really understood it; why it means so much to people. This is why people were up-in-arms when we wanted to change it because, you know…

Maggie makes a similar observation about those who have lived in the village for a long time:

MAGGIE: They say, well, I was married there; my parents were married there; my grandparents are buried there; and it's got great history to them. But that history, to a lot of them, just seems to be history. It doesn't seem to be with a knowledge of God, which I find quite difficult.

Struggling to explain this 'difficulty' to me, Maggie eyes fill with tears: "well, difficult to understand why other people don't believe in God like I believe in God". Kate offers an explanation why the church means so much to people with or without a personal faith:

KATE: It's the continuity of their lives, isn't it? That their family have worshipped there and been buried there or been married there and it's very important.

Kate illustrates her point by telling me about a woman displaced from St Peter's by the removal of the pew she used to sit on during Sunday worship. Refusing to re-join her friends on the new chairs she loitered instead at the back of the church: "my mother sat there, my grandmother sat there. I'm staying here." Bob explains that there is a "a very strange link between people and their parish church", a powerful "spiritual cement that binds a lot of people together". I speculate that perhaps this bond takes time to establish for newcomers like me:

KATE: They smirk a little bit more sometimes. They think, 'they're an odd lot'. Do you find that, Bob? They either join-in wholeheartedly or they sort of stand on the side-lines. They come to The Hub, though; you get a lot of newcomers come to The Hub, don't you?

ANDY: And people who have been here a long time will have a closer connection with the church even if they don't go to church on a Sunday?

KATE: You only have to walk around the churchyard, look at the names, local names.

While newcomers have a mixed attitude, Bob explains that people aren't necessarily less attached to the parish church today than they were thirty or forty years ago. He refers instead to a "Bell Ringer and Grave Worshipper syndrome". It is very difficult, he says, to encourage either group to come into the church or worship there. There is also, he suggests, an "unexplored area" of what he calls "church psychology". He guesses that forty percent of people who do walk through the door want to look at the arches, the spire and the stained-glass windows. He continues, "and they have no acceptance or knowledge or understanding that the church could be living stones rather than dead stones".

Like Maggie, Bob and Kate regard the church as a symbol of a lived Christian identity, rather than a "dead" materiality. Maggie also worries about other's attitudes to the church:

MAGGIE: As you know, a lot of the volunteers never come to church or don't appear to be interested in church when you talk to them. I mean, once or twice I have been horrified by things that Sara has said. And yet, I have spoken to Simon about it and I did speak to Bob about it. And they both said, 'oh no, Sara does believe in God.' And I said, 'well why does she want to cut it out of some of the literature and everything?' I mean, I don't want to appear to be critical of Sara because I think that she does work quite hard… But I do worry a little bit as to whether they've got only the interests of the project at heart, or whether they've got the interests of the church at heart.

Maggie fears a divergence of interest between the 'church' and the 'project'. Kate suggests a solution: the project should "employ more Christians". But Maggie's concerns run wider in what she describes as a "diverse village". She explains, "a lot of them don't seem to be interested in church" and say "'oh, that building'". To illustrate these differences, Maggie tells me a story about her experience of collecting donations on behalf of Christian Aid. One resident, she recounted, had saved up spare coins all year to give to her: "I'm glad you've come; I wondered when you are coming; I have got all this money ready for you". But others would say, "Oh, the dog ate it" or "I'm not giving to that!". She speaks approvingly of Christian missionaries engaged in disaster

relief work. This, she surmises, is a response to "the love of God in their lives". The man with the bag of coins, who was not a church-goer, therefore represents an enigma for Maggie. I suggest there are many morally concerned people who don't have God in their lives:

MAGGIE: As you say, there are a tremendous number of good people who don't have a faith as such. I admire the Buddhists. They don't believe in God in the same way that we do. But they believe in nature and the humanity of nature if you like. So, I can understand where they are coming from. Catholics - I couldn't follow the way they worship - but I had some good Catholic friends. And I had friends in all sorts of religions and non-religions.

In her survey of parishioner's attitudes to the church, Kate distances herself from those whose hostility to the re-purposing of the church she feels was unreasonable. She puts a slightly mocking tone to their sense of "outrage" amid fears of "having drunks in the porch" and "weirdos in there". Some claimed, "it's our church and why should we allow it to happen". Others simply vowed to never come through the door again. With a note of incredulity, Kate recalls someone asking in a public meeting, "are you selling your soul to the Devil?". She observes that "it's the ones who moan the most who never went to church anyway". Kate identifies instead with a constituency of the village she terms the "oldies". However, since this group also includes many who were unhappy with the internal changes to the church, Kate confesses to split loyalties.

KATE: But the other element is also the "oldies" which we're now part of, you know, we feel like we're dinosaurs and they want to push us out anyway; get rid of those people, come on. Suddenly they're such a pain in the neck. You know that's how people have been feeling. I've felt like it and I know when you talk to people they say well what's for us? The church isn't actually offering anything to anybody who've faithfully gone. You know, people have been faithful haven't they over the years. I always think of the generations past who have been faithful, prayed for that church.

Kate appears to be torn between the need for change and for continuity. In the end, she admits they found it impossible to "take sides". She feels obliged to respect the attachment that many long-term residents have with St Peter's even if she can't understand their reasons. Kate is quick to affirm that it has been a part of their lives since they arrived in the village over forty years ago. But it has also been a place of

"frustration" and deep "sadness" too. They sum-up what it has meant to them personally:

KATE: I'm going to be buried there. And Bob's coming in with me. I think it means, I suppose in a funny sort of way - although I never thought I'd say it - it's a part of my life really.

The 'church' has been a significant part of Bob and Kate's life together in Peterchurch for over forty years. They do not draw a sharp distinction between church and village as they retell their place-story to me in episodic detail. "I think the whole ethos of the village has always encouraged us", Kate adds, "I don't think it is just St Peter's…they're generous people in this village." Like Maggie, Bob and Kate associate St Peter's with great friendships and a profound experience of welcome which is inseparable from their sense of belonging in Peterchurch.

The three vignettes presented above begin to reveal different understandings of St Peter's. Each participant offers a different narrative. Maggie talks about fitting-in and adjustment, finding new ways to participate and belong. Sara talks eloquently about the immediate experience of a creative energy that may be encountered spatially in performative and social forms. Bob and Kate provide an insightful commentary on shifting relationships with the 'church' in village life. This place-talk reveal themes implicated in each participant's sense of place: (a) an 'existential' meaning; (b) authenticity and alienation; and (c) difference and change.

The regular members of the worshipping congregation display a notable reluctant to ascribe too much significance, or express an attachment to, St Peter's merely as a building. Bob laments people's interest in "dead stones" rather than joining-in a "living church", as Maggie puts it. Church-goers are careful to point out the 'church' is primarily its people. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the polysemic meaning of 'church' serves a pragmatic purpose. Its 'both/and' meaning asserts an indissoluble link between its physical-spatial historicity and the life-stories of the faithful, past and present. St Peter's enfolds the life-stories of its religious participants in its place-history. Maggie insists this makes it more than "just" history. St Peter's is therefore an important physical symbol of their Christian identity and of the faithful that have gone before them. For these believers, God is the 'original' author of their Christian lives and, consequently, of the true meaning of 'church'. Consequently, they struggle to understand why the building should mean so much to those who don't share their faith.

Paul Ricoeur (1981) asserts that a text is a discourse fixed by writing. As a 'text' that can be read and understood, a place is also fixed by its inscriptions: the physical architecture, symbols, and representations that mediate meaning in changing contexts (Jenz 2017). While discussing options for the proposed café, the architect responsible for the design of the internal re-ordering provides an illuminating theological commentary for the project team concerning the ritual space and its material symbols.

As we re-trace the steps taken by participants in the rite of Holy Communion, Simon invites us to step beyond the altar rail to admire the Saxon stone altar. A member of the project staff, who is not a church-goer, remarks uneasily that she rarely ventures this far into the sanctuary, having assumed she was not "allowed" to cross the threshold. The architect shares his own re-interpretation of the space. After pausing at the altar, we turn to look back at the square module that houses the kitchen at the far end of the Nave and creates the mezzanine level access to the public library beyond (Image 5). This, he says, he intended to mirror the square stone Saxon altar at the eastern end. Reminding us of the liturgy to "go in peace to love and serve the Lord", the conclusion of the rite and subsequent departure back into the everyday world marks the completion of a symbolic journey, rather like a pilgrimage (Gothoni 1993). According to his 'reading' there has been no division of liturgical space into "church" and "centre", it remains - in theological and symbolic terms - an integrated whole. Moreover, the architect has ascribed a new significance to its latest inscription. The 'second altar', he suggests, addresses a sort of liturgical imbalance by symbolising the sacredness of everyday life.

IMAGE 5: A NEW INSCRIPTION: THE 'SECOND ALTAR'.

(Source: personal collection)

The *performance* of worship is a synthesis of the 'given' religious-cultural meanings as a 'place of worship' and its 'existential' meaning for individual believers. For Bob, Kate and Maggie a strictly liturgical reading of the "holy space" is incomplete. Like a structural or linguistic analysis of a text, a purely spatial or material account offers an explanation of the symbolic space but doesn't necessarily insure an adequate *understanding* of the place (Ricoeur 1981). One can learn to read a church objectively through an exegesis of its embodied internal sign system (Taylor 2003), its object-related authenticity embodied in its architecture and symbols (Wang 1999). But, according to Bob, the "church psychology" surrounding its material culture misses its deeper significance. For the members of the worshipping congregation, the liturgical space has an existential authenticity because of the presence of God in their lives made possible by Christ's sacrifice. This is the primary meaning of 'church' enacted and celebrated in Holy Communion.

Second, the textuality of place opens a distance between the social-historical-linguistic context of a prior 'author' (or architect), or previous re-interpretations, and that of the present 'reader' (Jenz 2017, Ricoeur 1981). This means it can achieve a degree of autonomy that permits new 'readings'. But, contrary to Chidester and Linenthal (1995), the potentially contested meanings of St Peter's (as 'church', 'centre' or 'Hub') have little to do with its status as a sacred space. There is nothing to suggest in the ethnographic data 'contestation' over the legitimate *ownership* of sacred symbols. But some participants do express concerns over the legitimate *authorship* of St Peter's place-story. The question posed to me on a number of occasions, "where's Christ in it?", refers to the *authority* of a Christian tradition that is assumed to govern its reinterpretation in every historical context up to the present.

Equally, the textuality of St Peter's may result in alienation if the place doesn't "speak to me". As a liturgical space, St Peter's can be experienced authentically in the "individuality" of a personal encounter with God in worship. Sara's experience of Anglican worship as a child, however, didn't "reach" or "affect" her. Church buildings were non-places. She describes instead a phenomenologically lived experience of togetherness and an "energy" at St Peter's during the performance of African music that "speaks to people". This granted the event a personal significance she evaluates as

"spiritual". But this is a quite different 'authentic experience' to that described by Maggie. For Sara and her friend, the event may have expressed a truer sense of self in a liminal space with others, rather like that of a tourist as suggested by Wang (1999). It is an episode that may or may not be significant to the construction of one's narrative identity. For members of the congregation, on the other hand, the performance of worship is unambiguously 'existentially' authentic in the context of their whole lives; a faith story in which they construct their 'true' identity as Christians.

Finally, participants acknowledge a diversity of 'interests' and understandings of 'church'. The various typologies proposed in these terms reflect the perceived fragmentation of social identities in village life. In different ways, Maggie, Kate and Bob are grappling with the implications of alternative 'readings' of church. A tension resides in their fervent wish to welcome the stranger to St Peter's while, at the same time, preserving a distinctive Christian place-identity.

The three narratives reveal differing interpretations of a space newly exposed to a shifting socio-cultural environment. New modes of participation invite new perspectives. The ethnographic narratives that follow introduce these new participants and the different ways they find they can belong. To those already discussed, their narratives add themes of self-expression, a distaste for organised religion, and a moral sensibility that recall those traced by Charles Taylor (2007) in *A Secular Age*. For some new participants, 'secular' use of St Peter's represents an exciting new opportunity. For others, it poses a direct challenge to the inherited meanings and principal place-identity of St Peter's as a 'church'. By way of a parable, Bob offers an insight into what Bob called "the secular process" underway at St Peter's:

BOB: While I was a hospice chaplain, basically, and one of the most riveting papers I ever read I think was by two senior nurses and the heading was - and this was about the hospice movement - "the secularisation of an ideal". And over the ten years that I've been in the hospice movement, it began for me as a flagship Christian enterprise. And when I came out of the hospice movement, the palliative care discipline had taken over the movement and so this caused these deeply-thinking nurses to write this article. And I've just been feeling over the last few years I've been in ministry there's been this creeping secularisation of, let's call it the church, the building and everything that goes on in there. And I haven't really been able to express it except that, you know, I have felt that for some reason things have perhaps been taken over a little bit by what one might call the secular process.

Referring to its role as a community space, Bob explains, "I think it always advertised itself and set it up as a secular project". Careful to acknowledge the "incredible work" that had gone into it, Bob wonders whether that "at the heart, the touchstone of it", its secular identity has been "a very slight shroud over what could happen." Bob discerns "a sort of irony that almost the first two things through the door, so to speak, were Tai Chi and Yoga". The secular identity of 'The Hub' is also a touchstone issue for Sara. After a short documentary video about the Hub was produced by the Diocese of Hereford, she was particularly upset by the finished work. Her remarks to camera that the project was "secular" has been carefully edited out.

SARA: I felt they had broken my trust. Because I had very, very, very, <u>very</u>... The only stipulation... I made a stipulation, under the only circumstance I would be interviewed for it, was that they made it crystal clear within that thing that the words 'this is not a religious' or 'this is secular'. 'Not religious' is a much better than 'secular' because people get awfully confused. That it had to say that. And it didn't. So, it broke my trust. It is absolutely essential with every letter capital letter, bold print and underlined that's the Hub project, its identity, is secular. It has to be. It is absolutely essential.

The video was, as far as Sara is concerned, not only inaccurate but inauthentic. It neither reflected her self-identity, the place-identity she believes 'The Hub' offers its participants, or the work she and her team had put into creating it. Sara feels a responsibility, a custodianship, over The Hub's identity. The project has implicitly made a promise to people who might not, in other circumstances, enter a church building. The promise, is, in effect, that you do not have to be religious to belong here. The project's secular identity owes much to the creative process that Sara believes has gone into the production of a new social space. According to Sara, The Hub is the result of team effort channelling a spiritual energy. Its constituent parts were "magnetically attracted" as it emerged "organically". Moreover, the Hub's aesthetic "speaks" of a place-identity in a language people can understand and *respond* to:

SARA: I do have an aesthetic eye. So, it does matter hugely to me what it looks like. Once it has started, once the component parts start to be put together, I could see what else needed to happen. To make it. Whether it was plants on the table or some more fairy lights, or the lectern with the blackboard on it. And I am still a bit controlling about it that on Tuesday I will do the flowers and the plants, and I will cast my eye over it and make sure that it works the way I want it to look. And then, I just knew that there had to be website. It was very important that our branding, our visuals, our wholeness of being connected, that we had to have that; that all those things created an actual place. The kind of thing that people could really identify with. And it was just one of those things that I do this and then I do this and then I do this. It did feel quite channeled, really.

Drawing on her education in fine art and a former career in marketing, Sara talks authoritatively about the "brand values" that make The Hub "inviting". The brand, she explains, has a "higher purpose" because it is "bringing people together". She explains that the rebranding of the St Peter's Centre as The Hub was about making a new identity:

SARA: We respond to the visuals and branding so powerfully. We had no idea how powerfully we are responding to them. We don't analyse it, we just *are* responding. We just endlessly - on an hourly, daily basis - *are* responding to brand

and brand identity. It is that identity it conjures inside us. It creates our identity. We are relating to that identity. I wear, I dunno, Nudie jeans, because I am this sort of person, so I am going to become more of this sort of person. Because I am relating to that brand. So, it is a really significant thing what happens to us.

If a brand can "create our identity", as Sara suggests, then I wonder whether it may also express values that people can share:

SARA: Yeah. Yes! All of it is. It can be used as a force for good. And it can be used as a force for bad. We can be very unconscious of the power it has over us. I remember when I worked in advertising pedalling Pepsi to kids and getting people to use MasterCard and staring at screens for PlayStation, which were the brands I worked on. Part of my spiritual awakening was that I can't do that. That's wrong. It is morally inappropriate. But what I realised is that you can use it for good. And this is the thing: it can be used to good or it can be used for bad. And this is using it for real good because people do have a very strong relationship with it…Everything has an effect on people. I want to be in this place because it looks nice. I want to be in this place is because it's very welcoming. It all ties something together into a cohesive place.
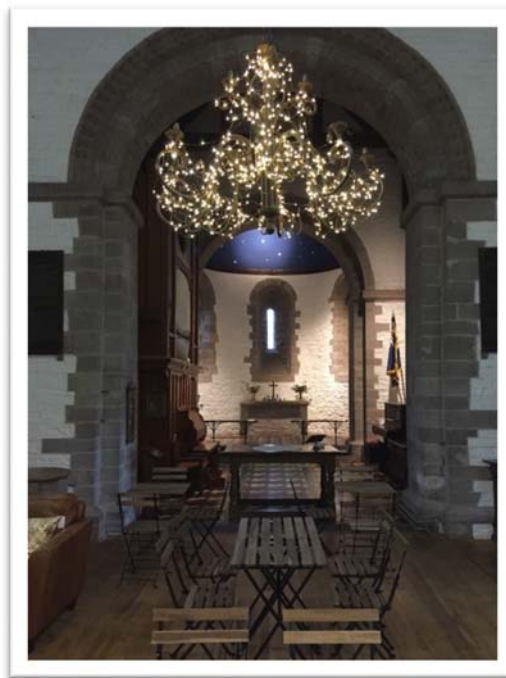

IMAGE 6: BISTRO TABLES ADJACENT TO THE 'HOLY TABLE' AND THE ILLUMINATED ALTAR BEYOND

(Source: Personal collection)

Sara believes that the "church's brand has become its big problem". The Hub brand, conversely, is something that people can relate to and identify with. The visual appearance of the café, as well as the website and other communications, constitute The Hub 'brand' identity. How people respond to it may, she suggests, produce a revised understanding of "place". The Hub, Sara insists, must be a 'secular' space that does not embody or represent religious beliefs. Instead, the café appropriates 'sacred space' as a numinous backcloth. It has been sympathetically staged using bistro chairs and tables, aged brown leather sofas, an old counter top and a large antique chandelier festooned with fairy lights. African music plays quietly in the background. Café customers respond positively to the creative attention Sara and the project team have given to the space and articulate an aesthetic place-discourse. Figure 3 describes the frequency of 'key themes' Hub users employ in their postcard responses. They comment approvingly on the beauty of the building, the light coming through the stained glass, its peacefulness, and its sacred quality. Hub users frequently use words such as "warmth", "atmosphere", and "beautiful" to describe their experience (Table 1). They applaud especially the "'welcome" they receive from the "friendly" staff and volunteers. It is a place to "meet" and make new "friends".
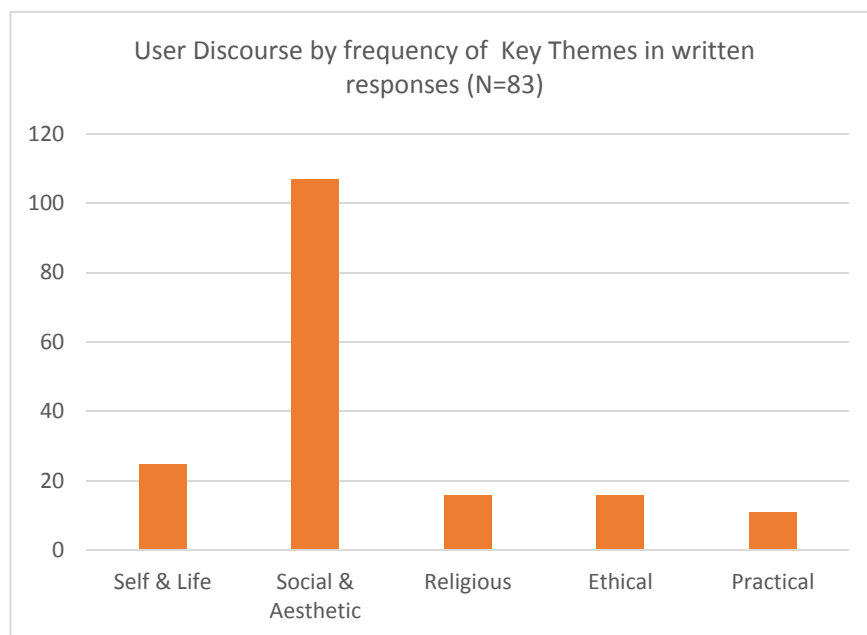

FIGURE 3: ANALYSIS OF KEY THEMES IN USER'S WRITTEN 'POSTCARD' RESPONSES
(Source: author)

Key Words	Frequency
Friend / Friendly	49
Place	32
Welcome / welcoming	29
Lovely	27
Church	26
Food	24
Meet / meeting	23
Hub	23
Warm	21
Community	16
Atmosphere	15
Wonderful	13

TABLE 1: FREQUENTLY RECURRING WORDS IN USER DISCOURSE (N=83)

(Source: author)

Despite the extensive re-branding, the discourse of Hub users reveals an ambiguous rather than strictly non-religious place-identity. 'The Hub' brand has not inscribed an entirely new set of place-meanings over its received social meaning as a place of worship. Rather, users express an awareness of the religious heritage of the café setting. They perceive a certain playfulness with which the ordinary and everyday has been accommodated in a recognisably religious setting, giving a new twist to a "church". Some employ a religiously-toned aesthetic to their experience of the café - for example, by describing it as a "spiritual" space. Only one respondent commented approvingly on its "non-religious" aspect:

A HUB USER: I mainly use the church for the children's play group on Thursday mornings and the café. I feel that these are great community spaces as I have met people from the area I otherwise wouldn't have. There is a friendly and welcoming atmosphere. The food at the cafe is fantastic and reasonably priced. These services along with the "community larder" and others have brought immense value to the church and village. The non-judgmental and non-religious side has brought it a new dimension to the church. Being non-religious myself I feel welcome here. Adapt to survive!

While visiting the café and learning more about the project, another café customer drew a sharp contrast with a baptism service she had recently attended at St Peter's. The latter she couldn't understand but claimed enthusiastically of the former, "I really get this!". A newcomer to the village values the opportunity it provides to meet people and make new friends without any reference to its religious purpose:

A HUB USER: It's a good place to meet people - being new to the village The Hub has provided us with a way to get to know people and make new friends as well as having a lovely café to bring friends and family when they visit.

Conversely, two participants at a monthly lunch club for the elderly appreciate the services offered by The Hub but nevertheless perceive an unresolved "tension":

A HUB USER: [I visited St Peter's] for their monthly lunch. The church is unbelievably different from when I first knew it nearly 30 years ago, with tables and chairs instead of pews and warm enough on a cold day. People were coming and going from the café and it felt a place of welcome and hospitality and God was in that. It has become a meeting place for the village but I recognise a tension in myself and some in the village for the loss of their church as a sacred space, a place to come apart and to pray.

IMAGE 7: EVERYDAY COMMUNION: THE HUB CAFÉ IN OPERATION

(Source: personal collection)

A HUB USER: About 35 of us met for a very jolly lunch in the former nave and I noticed that the Hub Café was still functioning - so it is proving to be a good way to meet old friends and make new ones - especially for newcomers. I am still sad that all the old pews were taken out as that does make a difference to the general 'feel' of the building - not so church-like as in the past. Some of the older parishioners have still not recovered from what they feel was a desecration of a beloved building. In thirty years' time, if the Church is still open, perhaps we oldies will be dead!

The Hub Café can, as Sara insists, speak to people. But its message has no propositional content as such; the aesthetic does not speak *abou*t something but, like an abstract artwork, speaks *of*. As Paul Ricoeur (1981) might put it, it doesn't project a world or invite an interpretation of what Gadamer (1975) calls the matter of the text. Communicating sensuous or felt values, the "atmosphere" sets a mood for the social activities facilitated by the space. Although 'The Hub' provides convivial setting for being-with, it is the social interactions themselves that make the place meaningful for its users. As a stage for the event of the Other, it might be described as a space for a 'secular' communion.

A BEAUTIFUL HARMONY?

Sara wants to uphold the freedom of Hub users to respond in their own way to an inclusive and welcoming social space. Bob does too. He describes how people may respond freely to a 'storied' place and talks earnestly about the "transforming" power of the gospel in people's personal stories of faith. In his typically thoughtful and reflective way, Bob recalls the message given by a notable theologian at a seminar he attended. The "crisis of modernity", he suggested, posed a "huge challenge" for Christians. Consequently, Bob suggests a "beautiful harmony" could be achieved between 'church' and 'centre'. He explains:

BOB: Yes, the café is, I think, wonderful. I often go over there and sit down; it's amazing who you meet and speak to and enjoy the lovely coffee and the cake and so on. But for there to be the availability of, not necessarily tracts, but that we wouldn't be afraid to have a Bible on the chair or even on the Holy table, which would be lovely. That's what I'm thinking.

Chatting in the cosy lounge of his cottage, Bob is eager to show me a Church of England booklet he had just received. It explains, he says, that people don't become Christians because they aren't given the opportunity. Bob says he is challenged by the booklet's appeal for these "new initiatives" to lay "pathways for people to faith." Café Churches, he says, are "fantastic". But the booklet offers "a template for how it can be done by retaining the beauty of the Christian gospel at its heart." Offering a "positive note" on the community space opened up within St Peter's, Bob says he was particularly delighted to be "invited or allowed" to have an exhibition of his paintings at The Hub. His collection of water colours was entitled "The A to Z of the Kingdom of Heaven", a project Bob had worked on for years.

BOB: I had such a wonderful response, really, and I did try to get there most mornings and have a coffee at The Hub and talk to people and perhaps sell a few cards or whatever. And that was...for me very uplifting because my paintings were gospel-based, and people responded to them. So, it's been absolutely wonderful; there have been wonderful openings via The Hub and the community facility.

According to Bob churches have always been "repositories of the most incredible art". I ask whether the Christian content of the art is important. Kate responds:

KATE: There's no sort of Christian...We sometimes take those 'Words for the Day' just to - we always have them delivered - we put one or two in there, but they always seem to disappear. Whether someone takes them or whether they get chucked in the bin we're not quite sure. It would be nice to have some Christian music playing at the same time as it was on. I know they sometimes have their own music. But it would be nice if someone had some kind of initiative to put something on quietly in the background. It doesn't have to be hymns, it could be any sort of pop-gospel music.

IMAGE 8: STAINED GLASS BACKDROP TO THE CAFÉ COUNTER

(Source: personal collection)

Bob's appeal for a "harmony" that retains the "beauty of the gospel" is not intent on reclaiming "holy space" set apart exclusively for traditional liturgical practice. Instead, representations of Christ and the gospel in scripture, texts, art or music or shared life-stories invite people to "respond". Their effect, it seems, is to make Christ and his message present. By affirming Christ, the author of faith, "in this", the passive but overt presence of these symbols thereby *authorises* the community use of liturgical space as continuous with its received place-story. Sara, however, is very wary of what she detects is a "hidden agenda" that would "totally, completely, profoundly" betray user's trust. She objects especially to what she calls "missioning" as unnecessary and entirely misplaced at The Hub. It means "thinking you need to be actively, regularly worshipping Jesus" and "persuading people to become part of an ideology":

SARA: I come from a line of missionaries so… But I think there can be a bit of a kind of 'lead people in' and then start 'missioning' them. And I don't agree with it because I just don't think that it is necessary. Because you don't need to bring people in to be part of a club. They are already in that club because they are already connecting with people. They don't have to start worshipping Jesus because they are already part of Jesus. They don't need to have that. What we do in the Hub is probably exactly what he said. But he didn't say you have to worship me in order to feel connected to other people. He just said be connected to other people and love them. So, I don't like missioning because I don't even think that Jesus would

have given a damn, to be honest. I think he would have just said, 'brilliant you are looking after people and loving each other. Job done'.

Well aware of the challenges facing a church with a small and ageing congregation, Sara fully respects the religious function of St Peter's. This, she insists, will always take precedence over The Hub. But the practice of worship is unnecessary for Hub users. She insists on a place-identity for The Hub that articulates values commensurate with Christianity but not with an exclusively Christian self-identity. Thus, a "place-congruent" place-identity can be shared by Hub users and church-goers alike (Twigger-Ross and Uzell 1996). A shared "place-referent" continuity of self-identity is a more difficult prospect. Whose story does the place tell? The place-meanings to which church members refer are inseparable from their self-concept as those with "God in their lives". What concerns Sara is the authenticity of people's experience at The Hub; insuring they are agents of the perception of their own meaningful environment (1996). Thus, Hub users should not be expected to "join a club" but be free to walk their own spiritual paths in order to connect with something bigger than themselves:

SARA: They don't need to go to a church on Sunday. This is me being very bold here. I feel a huge compassion for the church as well. They need to keep their congregations going. So, I feel a bit harsh saying that. But for me, I don't need to go to church on Sunday. I need to go for a walk or I need to do a kind thing, or I might do some drawing, or I need to be around people I love or just be kind and caring. Just do those things. Go and do them. But I also totally respect that people like my uncle find it incredibly comforting and that they do really connect with the Holy Spirit through that medium. So, go for your life if it works for you. But converting people or having that agenda is something that I feel uncomfortable with.

As far as Sara is concerned, users of The Hub are very sensitive to a "missioning" agenda and would be quick to notice one. As a consequence, a proposal to use of the Hub brand to publicise a new format of 'café church' on a Sunday drew a red line for Sara:

SARA: So, when Simon wanted it to call his new Sunday's service, "Hub Bistro", I was prepared to walk out of my job rather than back down on that one. And Simon and I had a dingdong about it. Not a big one because we get on great. But I was absolutely, under no circumstances, in any form going to let him call his church service "Hub Bistro". Ever.

The harmony Bob alludes to resembles what Chidester & Linenthal (1995) term a merging of spatial relations, or a hybridisation of sacred space. He is advocating a creative reinterpretation of the space that retains a continuity with its cultural-religious heritage. Sara, on the other hand, strongly opposes the confusion of The Hub with a "church" she conceives as an institution. Her critique of ideology is aimed at the "dogma" of what she calls a "stuck tradition". The social space created by The Hub, on the other hand, challenges a dominant order by re-imagining the space as a site for the practice of everyday life. Thus, as a lived space or third space (Lefebvre 1991, Soja 1996), the Hub creates a new unity of the imagined and real. Bob's 'beautiful harmony' is an alternative 'thirding' through the spatial unity of creative and traditioned space. It is the production of meaningful space that speaks *about* something. Thus, Christ is the propositional 'truth' content of St Peter's place-meaning. For Sara, Christ is an exemplar of what The Hub speaks *of* - an authentic spirituality of self-expression, being-with and loving the other. In different ways, both invite participants to respond to the place, make it their own, and feel they belong.

LOVING THY NEIGHBOUR

Unlike café customers and church-goers, volunteers in the community project at St Peter's do not refer primarily to its aesthetics or its existential significance as a place of worship (see Figure 4). From the standpoint of a volunteer, St Peter's creates opportunities for meaningful social activity. They articulate both place-making and self-making goals, such as a sense of fulfilment or accomplishment. Like users of The Hub, volunteering is an opportunity to "meet" people and make "friends". But volunteers also make frequent use of other-regarding terms and identify with a collective. The word "community" is by far the most frequently used in their reflectively written responses (Table 2). They describe "helping" and "contributing" to "the community". At the same time, the reasons they offer for doing so are often supplied with an autobiographical context. Volunteers may have reached a certain stage in life, such as retirement, want to keep or acquire skills, or have lost a spouse and become lonely.

More generally, volunteers contextualise their own lives with the "life of the village". Through their 'emplotment' (Mattingly 1998) in a shared life-story, they can hope to meet their self-needs by helping to address the needs of others. In so doing, they are both active members and agents of "community". The comment below is a typical response to the question of 'why' people volunteer at St Peter's:

A VOLUNTEER: I knew that once I had retired I wanted to do some volunteering work in the village. It would enable me to get to know more people locally, what was going on and to give something to the community. Village life is very important and being part of it and giving to it has meant a lot to me.
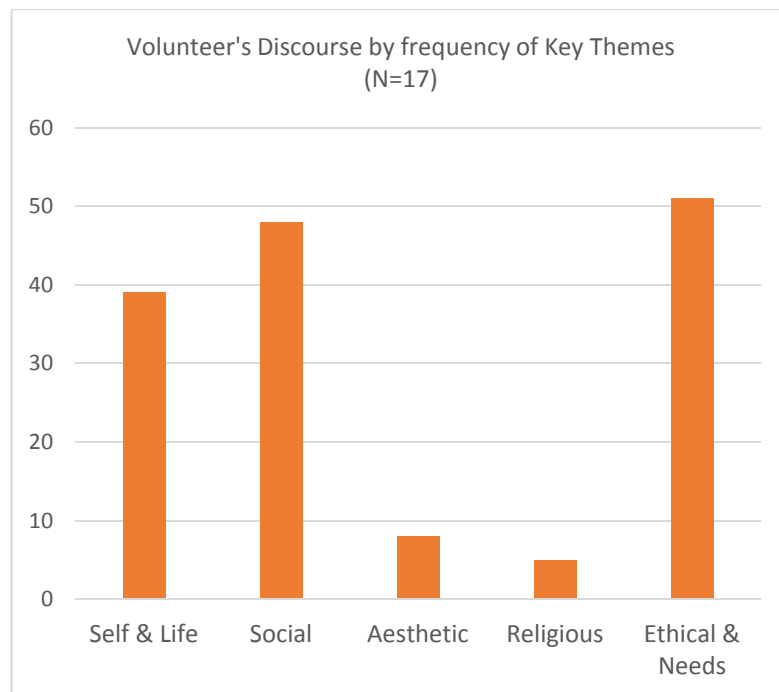

FIGURE 4: ANALYSIS OF KEY THEMES IN VOLUNTEER'S WRITTEN RESPONSES

(Source: author)

Key Words	Frequency
Community	30
Meet / Meeting	19
Place	16
Help / Helping	16
Friend / Friendly	15
Life	12
Church	14
Village	11
Need(s)	8
Team	7

TABLE 2: FREQUENTLY RECURRING WORDS IN VOLUNTEER'S DISCOURSE (N=17)

(Source: author)

In their narrative responses, volunteers are content to label St Peter's a "church", although only five of the seventeen regular volunteers who participated in the research drew attention to its religious function. One very active volunteer and event organiser told me, "I have never spent so much time in a church and I'm an atheist!". Each of the other four participants suggest a compatibility between its religious purpose and "everyday" life (below).

IMAGE 9: VOLUNTEERS SERVING IN THE HUB CAFÉ

(Source: personal collection)

A VOLUNTEER: St Peter's is where I have worshipped for nearly 40 years and has always meant a lot to me. I have been a PCC member for nearly all that time and I'm keen to keep the church vibrant and up to date and willing to accept changes in our life and the life of the church.

A VOLUNTEER: It is the most significant building in the valley and has been for hundreds of years. It still is a central place for the community for traditional church functions BUT is more part of everyday lives - a busier place altogether than previously. It feels warm and alive.

A VOLUNTEER: I am not a churchgoer, but I think it is important to keep a hub, whether the church or the café, going for the community, something that is sadly lacking in the towns (London). I think that when a 'townie' (like me) moves to the countryside they should embrace what it has to offer and participate as much as possible.

A VOLUNTEER: Using the church as a centre is a way of keeping a wonderful building used and preserved. It's a beautiful space for people to spend time in and I think this is important for the people who visit. Personally, I love the continuity a church gives to a community and welcome its changes in usage although I think it's important to remember its main function too.
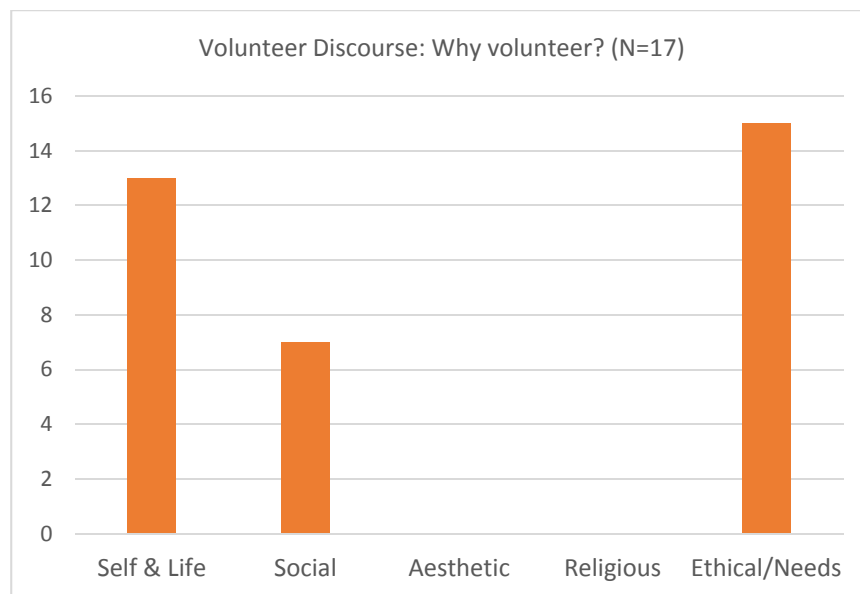

FIGURE 5: ANALYSIS OF KEY THEMES IN VOLUNTEER'S WRITTEN RESPONSES

(Source: author)

As illustrated in Figure 5, none of the 17 regular volunteers refer to aesthetic or religious aspects of the place, or to a personal faith, as their motivation for volunteering at St Peter's. Neither do these feature in their description of the difference St Peter's has made to their lives or that of the community. The discourse of volunteers instead discloses a third constellation of place-meanings one might call strictly 'ethical' rather than religious.

In the preceding ethnographic narratives, people talk in their own words about St Peter's. Their senses of place and belonging are disclosed in discursive themes that correspond to the different ways in which they participate. Table 3 summarises three key themes that emerge from these place narratives. While they suggest different perspectives, alternative ways to belong, they are not necessarily fixed or mutually exclusive. As my own mode of participation changed, so did my sense of St Peter's as a place. Tasked initially with developing a 'community development' project, I shared primarily in the 'ethical' discourse of a volunteer wishing to make a difference to village life. But 'change' trips off the tongue easily for a newcomer. Such talk is inevitably confronted by the effective history of a storied place that invites its reinterpretation (Gadamer 1975). Moreover, my understanding of St Peter's certainly evolved as other participants shared their place-stories with me.

Discourse	Form	Content	Participants	Key Themes
Religious	Story	"God in our Lives"	Congregation	The story of God in people's lives and/or continuity of social and self-identities
Ethical	Text	"Community", the Self/Other	Volunteers	Emplacement in a social entity; meeting the needs of self and other
Aesthetic	Artwork	Felt values	Hub Users	Social-aesthetic responses: welcome, warmth, beauty and friendship

TABLE 3: PLACE DISCOURSES IDENTIFIED IN ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

(Source: author)

In Wittgenstein's terms, a discourse is a social practice, a language-game played by an interpretive community. It is inevitably governed by linguistic norms conditioned by a

socio-historical context, the inherited traditions that establish a horizon to our understandings (Gadamer 1975). Each of our interpretations are subject to presuppositions or what Gadamer called prejudices (1975). What a place means to 'me' or 'us' is inescapably conditioned by the interpretive tradition we each inhabit. To suggest that we shape and are shaped by places is to say that 'belonging' is a two-way process of 'fitting-in'. It is a dialogue between 'given' socio-cultural place-meanings, and our place-referent sense of self, our situated self-interpretation (see Figure 1.). As a consequence, much of the place-talk narrated by participants at St Peter's is autobiographical. When invited to talk about 'place', participants often share stories about themselves. Research participants make sense of place through life-stories retold in narrative episodes (Linde 1993). The narrative structure of their self-concepts insures that place-meaning and identity are tightly interwoven. But the process of 'fit', our way of belonging, is always negotiated within a context which may differ from person to person in a plural, even secular, society. The aesthetic, ethical and religious discourses of place recall the three 'spheres of existence' proposed by Søren Kierkegaard (1964), the nineteenth century 'father of existentialism'. Broadly consistent with Wittgenstein's 'forms of life', in Kierkegaard's philosophical anthropology the 'spheres' correspond to relations of selfhood that propel human becoming forwards by 'repetition' rather than 'recollection' (Kierkegaard 2004, also Carlisle 2005, Evans 2009). Anthropologist Matt Tomlinson (2014) has explored how ideas penned by Kierkegaard's pseudonymous authors may help to resolve a familiar dilemma: whether the advent of Christianity occasions a continuity or discontinuity in socio-cultural meanings and identities (Cannell 2006, Robbins 2007). Bob describes a "secular process" that raises the same issues in the reverse direction and prompts believers to ask, "where's Christ in all this?".

Interpretations of place are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Most participants at St Peter's are content to affirm its meanings both as 'church' and as a public space - and identify positively with both. Indeed, as one respondent suggests "God is in" the welcome people receive at The Hub Café. Some members of the congregation have become enthusiastic café customers and volunteers at The Hub. On the other hand, the place discourses may disclose alternative 'readings' of St Peter's along a spectrum of participation and belonging (Jenkins 2004). Consequently, participants may legitimately

arrive at incommensurable understandings of place. A member of the worshipping congregation and a regular user of the Hub Café may both feel they belong but each in a different way. Moreover, either may fail to understand the meanings assigned by the other. As Kate said, "I don't understand why it means so much to people".

Even if we end up with different constructs, the social construction of place is nonetheless achieved by discourse. For those sharing a religious discourse, St Peter's "stands for" or signifies the story of God in the lives of the faithful. For other parishioners s too, St Peter's secures the "continuity of their lives" by publicly staging significant narrative episodes in their life-stories: weddings, baptisms and funerals - and perhaps concerts. In this interpretive tradition, St Peter's place-meaning is a 'given' by a common-sense and informs one's situated identity. For those whose life-stories are not (yet) deeply woven into its place-story, interpretations are less likely to satisfy what we may call a 'continuity condition'. Unlike the "oldies", newcomers are apt to reverse the direction of 'fit', projecting place meaning as an expression of their 'authentic' self in the aesthetic art of place-making.

The community project at St Peter's has been a lingering source of tension for some since its inception. It has the appearance at least of an intergenerational gap. Newcomers are perceived by longstanding residents to be more willing to 'author', create and accept change that some consider an effacement of inherited meanings and arouses suspicions of a conflict of "interest" (or else disinterest). Older residents concede that, with time, change will be freed from the constraint of continuity. The "dinosaurs" will be extinct. The 'church' will be finally squeezed out. The secularisation process will be complete. In the meantime, alternative place meanings and identities have been accommodated at St Peter's by spatializing them or conceiving difference in spatial terms. Thus, St Peter's can be a place of worship on Sunday *and* a cafe on Tuesday. It is a church *and* a community hub. But not in the same space at the same time. Different place-related meanings and identities are thereby safely confined to separate spatio-temporal compartments.

The arrival of the Hub Café, therefore, disrupted this delicate arrangement. It crossed and blurred spatial and hermeneutic boundaries. For some it further jeopardised the

continuity between past and present represented by a 'church' progressively being pushed out. The displacement felt by these, often older, members of the village reflects a sense of lost continuity with their past; a loss of place-identity. But, with time, The Hub may create a space where place-identities can be formed and affirmed in a different way, as Maggie's story shows. Moreover, with time, newcomers will become oldies too, rooted more deeply in-place by memories and a situated life-history. The "tension" expressed between the competing demands for change and continuity felt is therefore likely to persist. And so it should. It is in the discursive space *in-between* interpretive traditions where dialogue *both* governs *and* ensures movement. It is the space in-between where exchanges occur, boundaries blur, hybridisation and reversal happen, dichotomies dissolve, horizons are fused, and discordant voices can find a harmony.

IMAGE 10: FOOD ASSEMBLY WITH BOB'S "A TO Z OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN" DISPLAYED ON THE WALL
(Source: personal collection)

Immanent/subjective		Transcendent/objective
Experiential	*The 'Ethical'*	Propositional
Expressive	⬅————————➡	Historical
Authentic		Authoritative

FIGURE 6: A SPECTRUM OF INTERPRETIVE TRADITIONS

(Source: author)

Following Wittgenstein and Kierkegaard, our varied forms of life supply the interpretative schemes that structure our understanding of the world and our place within it. A spectrum of belonging corresponds to the interpretive traditions of a discursive community. Heuristically, on Figure 6, we may locate the aesthetic-social discourse (expressing The Hub 'brand' of welcome and connectedness) within an expressive-experiential-authentic tradition. The religious discourse of a place of worship for those with "God in their lives", on the other hand, sits closer to a propositional-historical-authored tradition. Borrowing from Derrida, John Caputo (1987) depicts the latter as 'Rabbinic' and the former as 'Poetic', correlative with Kierkegaard's temporal model of (Gadamerian) recollection or (Derridean) repetition. Put differently, here lies the hermeneutic tension between continuity and change. Gadamer (1975) suggests however that different perspectives, or horizons of understanding, can be fused through dialogue or conversation. According to Merold Westphal (2009), this "always involves rising to a higher universality…the two worlds do not remain merely particular – alien, closed, eccentric to one another – but become part of a larger community within which differences are not abolished but mediated by conversation that effects understanding" (2009: 107). This does not mean that participants occupying different traditions will necessarily agree about the truth of the matter under discussion (e.g. what the place means). They may, however, understand the truth claims (what the place is about) inherent in each other's discourse.

Mutual recognition and respect lead to mutual understanding. This requires a *productive*, creative interpretation that responds to the *reproductive* re-interpretation of inherited, story-formed meanings and vice versa. It neither grants authorial privilege to re-write the place, nor does it hold fast to a privileged interpretation "stuck" in the context of a previous readership. The conversation concerns our inherited possibilities,

a hermeneutic circle that is faithful to both the past and the present but oriented toward the future (Caputo 2007, 2018). Accepting Kate's invitation to "join-in" by participating in conversation, the different voices at St Peter's may find a "beautiful harmony". Dialogue inevitably results in story-telling since to share a sense of a place we have made our own also expresses *who we are.* These stories may be reproduced in numerous sharable forms as oral histories, personal testimonies, music, art and heritage displays. The representation of placeness is like a song we write *and* perform together.

Thus, it is the discursive space in-between, in a liminal and ambiguous zone of 'both/and', where hermeneutic movement occurs. It is also the "dialogic space" of place-making, where "many interpretations of place, actions, and fictions about the place-becoming" are explored (Schneekloth and Shibley 1995: 7). It is not a negotiated common ground where values or meanings necessarily converge. Rather, it is where otherness is acknowledged in the interplay of difference. It is in this 'ethical' middle ground that the 'volunteer' resides, where distinctions collapse in the space between oneself and another. Beginning with self/other, this intersubjective process hauls into a clearing a train of categories, classifications and conceptual distinctions: sacred/secular; presence/absence; belief/unbelief; religion/spirituality. Brought into the light of dialogic space, previously contested meanings may become hyphenated as mutual understandings of a singular place emerge: café-church or hub-church. Movement is produced in the midst of a creative tension, the harmonic of a string stretched taut between continuity and change. 'Being' in-place through discourse is the movement of becoming-together, of dwelling *and* journey, place *and* pathway.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through the voices of different participants, this mini-ethnographic study points to a possible future for a multi-purposed church-building at the heart of rural village life. The concepts of place-meaning and place-identity have provided a lens to bring into sharper focus important themes of authenticity, alterity, continuity and change. In this case study we find participants in a postmodern, post-secular age situated in social space, engaged in conversations, sharing life-stories, discovering ways to belong. By sharing what a place means to 'me', we can each participate in a chorus of "*our* place". The challenge at St Peter's lies with the institutional Church as a choir-leader conducting different voices in the performance of belonging. Conceived abstractly as the predetermined outcome of a project, the concept of 'community' as a social identity is always imperilled by closure. That is, by drawing lines between 'us' (who are similar) and 'them' (who are different). Instead, a space of radical belonging, openness to the other, is a 'communion' that dissolves distinctions in an ongoing process of social discourse. In this discursive space "this is a church" is transformed into a question to which "it doesn't speak to me" is a legitimate reply. To which "where's Christ in this?" is answered with "God is in the welcome people receive". Where a squeezed and enclosed "holy space" is found to have opened-up for those who "connect with others and love them". But these are only opening exchanges. If a place speaks, we must expect multiple responses in an ongoing exchange. It entails a commitment to a bottom-up negotiation of what may or may not be deconstructed in the recreation of place in a space of mutual recognition. Its diverse participants do not re-write the place-story; they become instead co-authors of its next chapter. May the conversation continue.

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