

Converting St Barnabas Church

Accommodating our food co-operative



The new cold room comprises two commercial freezers and a walk-in fridge.

St Barnabas Church was built in 1911. The building was upgraded significantly in 1932 and a substantial parish hall added at the same time. That Hall burnt down in 1961 and was rebuilt in 1964. The main space in the new hall was dominated by a colossal theatrical stage. Within a few years, the amateur dramatic group at St Barnabas was producing the very best pantomimes anywhere in Oldham.

Times changed. TV and the internet intervened. The Church's last production occurred in 2005 and the stage deteriorated then became an embarrassment. It soon became unsafe. Its electrics had to be disconnected. The wood around the theatrical trapdoors rotted so openly that policing functions became a necessity. The room behind the stage used to store props became derelict and was openly decaying. Viridor Environmental Credits helped us convert this room to become the Church toilet block in 2018 and the stage was converted in 2020 to house the Church's food co-operative.

St Barnabas Church serves a poorer part of Oldham, itself a town with daunting levels of poverty. The Church had therefore run various food programmes over the years. At the beginning of the first national Covid lockdown, we housed the latest version of the food project in a small side room, but we wanted it to grow. We wanted to alleviate a larger amount of local need.



Above Panorama view of the ambient food room. It accommodates fruit and veg, tins and bottles, packets and boxes.

With the help of Viridor Environmental Credits, we removed the stage in its entirety to create a vehicle for helping local people. It currently feed 150 people a week (including dependents). That number is growing.

The stage was supported on three dwarf walls, so the space beneath formed four spacious storage bays beneath its wooden boards. We retained two of these walls, using them as the bases of floor-to-ceiling 'stud' walls.

We created three bespoke storage rooms:

- The right-hand quarter became the fridge and freezer room. It houses a walk-in fridge and two glass-fronted freezer units. The room is thermostatically controlled because this amount of refrigeration produces large amounts of heat.
- The second room—again a quarter of the original footprint of the stage—is a bespoke storage room. It holds the materials we previously stored under the stage.
- The remainder of the space created a sizeable room the 'ambient room' in which we store the fruit and veg, tins and bottles, packets and boxes. It's fitted with electric heating and internet connectivity.

Finally, we re-imagined the foyer to facilitate good social distancing and also making it lighter and easier to clean.

This project has vastly improved our eco-Church profile. Firstly, we distribute nearly three-quarters of a tonne of food each week that would otherwise have gone straight to landfill. We've fitted out the new rooms with low-carbon LED lighting and electric heating. And some of the old wood from the stage has also been recycled.

***Before and after***

The stage above and the three new rooms below. The new rooms (left-to-right) are ambient food, storage, and fridge and freezers.





Left The stage was supported on three dwarf walls. We used the space beneath as storage bays beneath its wooden boards.

We retained two of these walls, using them as the bases of floor-to-ceiling 'stud' walls.



Above Creating the stud walls that mark out and support the infrastructure.