

Report for the Parish Council from Ranworth and Woodbastwick PCC's

The benefices of Blofield and Broadside started 2025 in interregnum with ministerial oversight given to the parishes in some instances by the established ministerial team of the Blofield benefice and in other instances by other ministers. The interregnum for both benefices ended with the licensing of Revd Andrew Tapsell as Priest in Charge in June 2025 and Revd Cheryl Ramballi as Associate Priest in May 2025. Our thanks are extended to all who led the churches through this time of vacancy.

A scheme to unite the benefices continued to be pursued by the relevant authorities throughout 2025 but was not brought to fruition by the end of the year. The new ministerial oversight of the benefices has signified a new chapter in the life of our parishes, particularly for those of the broadside benefice who have been without priest(s) appointed to permanent, licensed positions for five years.

During the extended vacancy St Helen's, Ranworth was able to provide a weekly Sunday morning service which alternated between Holy Communion and Morning Prayer. This was due to commitment from the Ministry Team, clergy from across the Diocese and Helen Thurtle, Authorised Worship Assistant (AWA). These efforts sustained church life and a regular core congregation of around eighteen members. The efforts of the congregation and villagers enabled outreach and a regular interface between church and the village community.

St Fabian and St Sebastian made the decision to become a Festival church. This was due in part to unfortunate circumstances resulting in a reduction in the regular congregation. Having lost their Church Warden, who was also pivotal in providing lay led services, the Sunday morning worship became irregular. This resulted in a decline in numbers. The regular congregation is now approximately five members.

Worship and Prayer

All churches in the benefice have received a range of services over the year. All PCCs are to be commended for their hard work in bringing to fruition services that the community were looking forward to and then thoroughly enjoyed. Evensong, Harvest Festival, Carols on the Staithe, Carols by candlelight. Other services such as Christingle, Christmas morning Eucharist, Good Friday, Easter Eve, Easter Morning were joint services hosted at Ranworth. The main festival services were well attended by the villagers.

A regular weekly bible study, held at the Tea Room, has brought together members from several of the churches. The hope is for this to grow in numbers.

Life events

The churches continue to serve its community for baptisms, weddings, funerals, burial of ashes and memorials. In September, Woodbastwick held a wonderful baptism service. Ranworth, sadly had one funeral of a long-standing friend in the village and Woodbastwick had two burials of ashes. To offset this circle of life, we look forward to two weddings booked at Ranworth for this summer.

Ranworth has a transient congregation as a large part of the housing in the village are second homes as well as visiting holiday makers, moored on the Staithe. Families may return for Easter and Christmas, and church may well have young adults and children at the service.

Over the years, the change to the mooring times on the Broads has also affected the number of visitors able to attend Sunday service before heading off. The Waterways Chaplains have kindly started conversations with the Broads Authorities as to how we could work together on this. At Easter, the church asked for an extension to mooring time for anyone wishing to attend service. Thankfully, a few people realised and attended the service. This was encouraging and offers St Helen's an impetus to progress these conversations with the Broads Authority.

Woodbastwick village and its accommodation is unique compared to surrounding villages. Church attendance is not regular, but festival services are well supported as is the fabric of the church building.

Communications

The CofE website 'A church Near You' is regularly updated with our services and some church-based activities. Members of the PCC, church and village help with uploading information onto social media, and this is proving to be an ideal way to reach many villagers and villages.

Outreach: At Ranworth, the church doors are opened daily due to the goodwill of friends and villagers of which we are incredibly grateful. The footfall across the church, the Glebe, the Visitors Centre (VC) / Tea Rooms is substantial when

compared to many rural parish churches. The number of visitors is significantly increased from Easter to October.

The church building attracts huge historical interest from near and far as well as international visitors due to the wonderful Rood Screen, Cantor's desk, Antiphoner and possibly the chest which is being dated as this could also be Medieval. The tower remains an attraction offering a wonderful view across the Broads for those able to conquer the 89 steps, 2 ladders and a trap door! One of the projects for this year is repair to the trap door.

The prayers in the Prayer Box demonstrate that, St Helen's remains a place of sanctuary for many. People and children come here to meet with God, and this is reflected in their prayers. The prayer corner needs to be developed further.

Visitors Centre and Tea Room

We give thanks and celebrate the asset of the VC and Tea Room. The income from this asset contributes to the finances required for the upkeep of the church as well as mission and ministry. Underpinned by faithful members of the PCC, church and villagers, the VC continues to operate its business well, but more importantly the VC is a 'community hub' which many are drawn to because of the joy and warm welcome they receive from our volunteers. We offer huge thanks to everyone who gets involved in the life of the VC. There are so many friends who make jams, provide knitted items, donate puzzles, books, and cakes.

During the winter months when most of the Broads is 'hibernating', the VC is offered as a warm space, with refreshments. This is a regular annual event, where we welcome many of the villagers living in Panxworth. This year we advertised in the Village Book and welcomed visitors from neighbouring villages too. This facility offers much to those who are dealing with loneliness. It offers friendship and pastoral care during the winter months as people look out for one another each week.

Over the past few years, the number of volunteers has declined however, recently families have asked us to host birthday teas for their elderly parents for whom the Tea Rooms and St Helen's hold a special place. The NWT have also booked the Tea Rooms for full days to provide refreshments for their special supporters. This may be an avenue to further investigate as we cannot afford for this asset to be reduced further. One of the large projects proposed for the end of this year / early next year, will be the refurbishment of the 30-year-old VC kitchen. The PCC are hopeful for grants in support of this.

Outward Giving

The churches are committed to supporting several charities. There is an ongoing partnership with the Well and Shepherd Pantry who provide, Food Bank, fresh food pantry, day centre and so much more. Members from the organisation attended the Harvest Festival service and gave the sermon talk. At this service donations were also made to Hebron House, a safe place for women.

At Christingle, donations were made to the Children's society. For Pancake Day support was given to the Bishops Lent Appeal. Tea and cakes were sold in support of the annual Macmillan Coffee morning.

Woodbastwick hosted the joint Remembrance Day service where a donation was made to the Royal British Legion. At the Harvest service donations were made for Food Bank. Christmas services supported Nelson's Journey, a local Norfolk charity for children who are bereaved.

PCC

The PCC meetings are held bi-monthly and run extremely well. Over the years membership to the PCC has reduced and has impacted each of the PCC's in filling the required offices for its governance. Members have been faithful in stepping forward to hold more than one office. At present Les Cook is Church Warden, Treasurer and Fabric Officer at St Helen's. However, Les will not be standing for office again this year. The PCC and church are most grateful for all the hard work, dedication and contributions Les has provided over the years. This has made a significant difference to the life of St Helen's. Les has been pivotal to the smooth operations of daily church activities and care of the fabric of the building, particularly during the difficult time of vacancy. We wish Les well for all his future endeavours.

Woodbastwick has been without a church warden 2025/26. Helen Thurtle kindly stepped in to take on the role of Parish Safeguarding Officer for both Ranworth and Woodbatwick. During the year, Woodbastwick PCC reduced from four members to three. Caroline Cator continued as Treasurer and Lay Vice Chair. The PCC now has 3 members co-opted as Secretary, Fabric Officer and Parish Safeguarding Officer.

Our prayer is for us to continue to work and journey well together, addressing challenges, embracing opportunities and looking at how we can better maximise and develop church life as we seek to serve God and His people here in this beautiful part of the Norfolk Broads.