

Holy Innocents APCM Reports 2025

Reflections from the Vicar, The Rev'd Fr Benjamin Edwards

Grace and peace to you all.

This past year has been a season of intentional reflection for our benefice, a time of leaning into God's call for holy rest. As we navigate changes within our Parochial Church Councils (PCCs), we acknowledge that this period has brought transition. Several dedicated members have concluded their season of service on the PCCs, and we extend our sincere gratitude for the time, wisdom, and energy they invested in the governance of St Peter's and Holy Innocents. Sadly, some transitions were due to age or illness, and it is with heavy hearts that we have also bid farewell to faithful servants who have since entered eternal rest. Our prayers rise especially for the souls of Christopher Wells, Charles Gorer and Pat Sheppard, all steadfast members of our PCCs in years past. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Despite this quieter period in terms of outward activity, the Spirit has undoubtedly been at work among us, yielding many blessings. The vibrant fellowship enjoyed after our services continues to be a source of great personal joy and encouragement. This warmth and genuine connection has been instrumental in welcoming many newcomers into our church family, making them feel truly seen and valued. This spirit of positivity shines through in our welcome and our invitation to others to share in the life of St Peter's and Holy Innocents. This is a strong foundation upon which we can confidently build in the year ahead as we begin discerning and planning our outreach and mission anew.

Building upon this period of consolidation, our focus now gently shifts towards charting our course forward. At the heart of all we do, we must cherish and nurture our spiritual core: our ongoing conversation with God in prayer, the deep wisdom and

encouragement drawn from Scripture, and the profound spiritual nourishment received in the Eucharist. These are the bedrock practices through which God equips us for His Kingdom work. They empower us for our essential mission: sharing the life-changing Good News that Jesus Christ lived, died, rose again, and remains perpetually present with us. By deepening our own understanding and knowledge of the faith, we become ever more effective witnesses, ready to cultivate the growth God has already begun in our midst.

Worship: The Heartbeat of Our Churches

Our established pattern of worship has largely continued this year, offering a rhythm of grace through Sung Eucharist, Holy Communion (both contemporary and from the cherished Book of Common Prayer), and reflective Evensong. All Age services remain a valued part of our benefice life. At St Peter's, we continue to explore non-Eucharistic formats for these occasions, enabling lay leadership by gifted

individuals such as our Reader, Kathy Drakes, and others authorised to lead worship. Our recent Mothering Sunday service and Harvest Festival, both Services of the Word, were well-received examples of this approach.

Christmas once again saw our churches filled, with services across the benefice experiencing encouraging attendance. I received particularly positive feedback following the Crib Services, which many families from Great Barton, Thurston and beyond now consider a cherished part of their Christmas tradition – a wonderful connection with our wider community.

This year's Easter services were thoughtfully adapted based on previous attendance patterns, and we saw an encouraging response. While acknowledging that Easter is often a precious time for families to gather, we also gently hold the profound significance of this holiest of seasons for Christians – the journey into the Passion, death, and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. As St. Paul writes in Galatians 2:20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. This powerful verse speaks of a radical identification with Christ's sacrifice, leading to a transformed existence where Christ Himself becomes our life source. It echoes our deepest longing to know Christ intimately, sharing in His death so we might also share in the power of His resurrection life. To truly enter into this mystery, we must journey together! Perhaps, in the year ahead, we can encourage one another more intentionally to embrace this sacred pilgrimage and even invite visiting family and friends to walk alongside us.

Finally, heartfelt thanks are due to all who make our worship possible. Our dedicated Churchwardens work tirelessly behind the scenes. Our Reader, Kathy Drakes, consistently enriches our understanding with her excellent preaching and insightful teaching, offering fresh perspectives on the Gospels and faithfully exercising her ministry across both villages. We are also deeply grateful for the continued support of our retired clergy, Reverend Canon David Crawley and Reverend Mark Hunt, who readily make themselves available for services and occasional offices. Furthermore, we have been blessed by the ministry of The Rev Canon Stephne van der Toorn, kindly assisted by her husband Joop. A joyful footnote: Coco the guide dog has now officially retired, hanging up her harness after a special retirement blessing at St Peter's. We continue to delight in her presence (and occasional gentle snuffles!) during our services!

Ministry & Mission: Serving Our Community

Our outward-facing ministry remains consistent, with a continued focus on investing in the young people and families within our parishes. Plans to enhance the Children's Corner and the Prayer Corner at St Peter's have unfortunately been paused this year as we seek a new Treasurer. This challenge of filling key roles is sadly familiar across the wider Church of England, but we remain hopeful

and prayerful that we can make progress on this project in the coming year. Our engagement with local schools continues to be a highlight. I greatly value my weekly visits to Thurston Primary School and Great Barton Primary School to lead assemblies, and it is wonderful that our Reader, Kathy Drakes, has also begun contributing her gifts there. Pat Sadler continues her valuable service as an active governor at Thurston Primary School. I have stepped back from my governor role at Thurston as part of practising healthy self-care amidst my various parish responsibilities – a reminder of the importance of not spreading ourselves too thinly!

I also continue to enjoy my visits to the SENDAT Special Education schools (Priory) in Thurston, leading sessions focused on the major Christian festivals. These are always rewarding times, filled with insightful questions and enthusiasm from the pupils. The children also visit St Peter's, as evidenced by the wonderful Remembrance artwork displayed in the church. This is a relatively light commitment, typically involving two or three visits annually. At Thurston Community College, I run a monthly group for Christian children, who come with lunch and we chat about our faith lives and various aspects of Christianity. There are currently a dedicated group of three boys who come, speaking enthusiastically about their faith. It has been some time since the church has had any input into Thurston Community College, so this is a particular blessing to be asked to run a group after several years of gentle engagement.

My role as Chaplain (or Padre) to the 863 (Thurston) Squadron RAF Air Cadets continues to be fulfilling. Leading sessions on Thursday evenings covering ethics, meditation, and teamwork provides opportunities for meaningful conversations. I have been particularly encouraged by cadets approaching me to discuss matters of faith. We were pleased to have an officer represent the Squadron at our Remembrance Sunday service, and permissions are being sought for a cadet detachment to attend formally in 2025. The Squadron's presence at the D-Day anniversary beacon lighting on the New Green was a credit to them and a poignant moment for the village. We anticipate a similar community event for VE Day in early May.

Ecumenically, we continue to enjoy good relations with the Benedictine Sisters at Montana. Freedom Church is undergoing some structure changes, one of which is their hope to engage with Thurston folk. I am hoping to initiate a monthly Minister's Breakfast where the leaders of faith communities in Great Barton and Thurston can pray together and encourage each other. Wherever Christians embrace each other's presence, despite minor differences, the Spirit lends all a hand, so do please pray for this to come together.

Pastoral visiting continues, though I confess I have had less time than I would wish for this vital ministry. However, I am encouraged by the development of a dedicated pastoral team across both churches and the imminent plan to advertise and offer Holy Communion at home for those unable to attend church services in person. These are all areas of ministry we seek to nurture and grow. I encourage everyone to keep sharing opportunities where our churches can offer support and care within our communities, schools, villages, and church families.

Transitions, Gratitude, and Remembrance

Firstly, I wish to express my profound thanks to our Churchwardens for their unwavering commitment and hard work throughout this year. Tim Frost, with invaluable help from Angela Pearce, ensures Holy Innocents remains a beautiful and welcoming space, while also contributing significantly to projects aimed at preserving and enhancing the church for future generations.

The wardens at St Peter's, Pat Sadler and Margery Ashford, have faced particular challenges operating without a Treasurer and with a smaller PCC. Their ability to keep everything running smoothly is a testament not only to the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit but also to their extraordinary dedication, Christian service, and deep love for St Peter's. A most heartfelt thank you to you both!

I must also extend another huge thank you to Peter Robinson for his steadfast support and assistance. Peter, your contribution to the smooth running of both churches and your support of my own ministry here is deeply appreciated. It has been a challenging period at times, and your encouragement has been invaluable.

Our Reader, Kathy Drakes, continues to flourish, blessing us with her insightful teaching, powerful preaching, and pastoral sensitivity. I know we have all gained immensely from Kathy's wisdom and her leadership in worship. We thank God for her energy, vision, and dedicated ministry among us.

There are many others to thank, and I should be listing names for pages if I did! But rest assured that I give thanks for you daily in my prayers, and again do so here – thank you for all that you do for our church community, it really does lift us all up in Christian love.

With sadness, we have also said goodbye to several dearly loved members of our church family this past year. The sting of grief remains, yet we hold their memories close. We grieve the loss of Charles Gorer, a wise former member of the Holy Innocents PCC, who remained active in church life until the end. A talented poet, his final composition for Remembrance Sunday was read last year, a particularly poignant moment. We will miss his dry wit, cheerful disposition, and gentle kindness. We give thanks for his friendship and pray for his partner, Annie Wallace.

We grieve the loss of Christopher Wells, a former Churchwarden and PCC member at St Peter's, among many other roles he undertook over the years Christopher's connection to St Peter's spanned generations – reflecting on his longevity, I recall him remarking around the time of the King's Coronation, "Of course, this will be my fourth coronation...". We will remember his wisdom, dedicated service, good humour, willingness to listen, and his deep passion for the church building, a legacy passed down through his family. We thank God for all Christopher gave to this parish and pray for his wife, Elizabeth. We also grieve for Pat Sheppard, a long-time faithful member of Holy Innocents, active in the Mothers' Union and the choir in years past. Pat's kind and conscientious nature was appreciated by so many. We remember her husband David, and continue to hold him and their family in our prayers.

These are but a few of the faithful souls from our congregations who are now with the Lord. There are many more stories and memories of their presence among us. I encourage us all to keep their memories alive, cherishing them as part of our church family, now participants in the heavenly communion of saints.

A Final Note: The Spirit's Gentle Growth

Despite the necessary focus on consolidation, there has been a tangible movement of the Holy Spirit within our churches. Perhaps less visible in the day-to-day administrative tasks, it is powerfully evident in the deepening friendships, the warmth of our welcome, and the overall atmosphere within our two worshipping communities – communities visibly growing in faith and fellowship. This gentle, persistent work of the Spirit seems to gather strength with each passing month. I sense it spilling out into conversations I have around the villages; there is a growing feeling that both St Peter's and Holy Innocents truly belong to their communities, and that our prayers are valued and felt.

This growing sense of belonging and spiritual vitality is the foundation I have fervently prayed for – a bedrock upon which we can continue to build Christ's church here in Great Barton and Thurston. Of course, nothing is ever perfect, and perhaps not every decision or style will suit everyone all the time. But, like the wider Church throughout history, we are finding a rhythm of worship, fellowship, and service that resonates with us and bears witness to our Christian faith for those around us.

From this place of quiet growth and hopeful expectation, we can now begin to discern together where God is calling us next. That is both an exciting and truly sacred prospect.

Amen.

Annual Report 2025

In addition to all that Fr. Ben has said, we would like to add that we have made or are planning various improvements. The paths in the churchyard have been improved which will make things easier for the elderly and disabled and those with wheelchairs. As an

Inclusive Church, we are reaching out to LGBT people and people of different backgrounds and cultures. As part of our Eco Church activities, we have sown a wild flower meadow in the churchyard. A new flush toilet is to be installed, possibly where the existing one is, with water and sewage dispersing naturally in the soil with drainage. It may however be installed in the Church, which would help the elderly and disabled. We are planning major improvements to the Church Institute, to widen its use by the village and its outreach. It is a valuable asset for this. There would be a new front entrance and lobby at the rear for safety reasons (avoiding the main road) and a new heating system would be good, and we could instal solar panels (for which there are grants available). There would be wheelchair access through the main door, and a wheelchair path through the garden. We need to get building/planning control consent and planning permission. The total cost is about £70,000, but we have received donations and legacies which help considerably, although we will need to raise funds and apply for grants.

In 2024 we had one Baptism, two Marriages, four Funerals, one Funeral Service elsewhere, and seven Committals of Ashes

We try to enable ordinary people to live out their faith as part of our parish community through:

- ‘ Worship and prayer; learning about the gospel, and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus.
- ‘ Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish
- ‘ Missionary and outreach work.

To facilitate these objectives, it is important that we maintain the fabric of the Church of Holy Innocents, and, as mentioned already, the Church Institute which we use for outreach.

Two members of the PCC currently sit on the Deanery Synod. This representation provides the PCC with an important link between the parish and the wider structures of the church.

We are very grateful to Peter Robinson for keeping us up to date with General Data Protection Regulations, and to Kathy Drakes for overseeing Safeguarding requirements for us. Also, our thanks to Peter, for looking after our website and Facebook page. And we would like to thank Wendy Jones and all those involved with the flowers throughout the year. We all greatly appreciate their efforts and the beautiful vases of flowers, and it is difficult because they need more volunteers. And there are so many people who help in different ways.

Structure, Governance and Management

The Parochial Church Council is a corporate body established by the Church of England and operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure. The PCC is excepted by order from registering with the Charity Commission.

The method of appointment of PCC members is set out in the Church Representation Rules. At Holy Innocents the membership of the PCC consists of the incumbent (our vicar), the two churchwarden/s, currently two members of the Thingoe Deanery Synod and five other elected members of the electoral roll.

The PCC members are responsible for making decisions on all matters of general concern and importance to the parish including deciding on how the funds of the PCC are to be spent.

Administrative information

Holy Innocents Church is situated on Church Road, Great Barton. It is part of the Benefice of Great Barton and Thurston, within the Diocese of St. Edmundsbury and Ipswich of the Church of England.

The correspondence address is:

The Vicarage, Church Road, Great Barton, Bury St. Edmunds, IP31 2QR

Fabric Report

Toilet

After a thorough review of our toilet facility, agreement to proceed with replacing the external composting unit with an internal water flush toilet was approved.

The original internal toilet plans have now been redrawn. The new PCC will need to approve the latest plan layout. An application should be ready to submit to the DAC for their June meeting.

Water Drainage Downpipes

We have received a quotation for this work to be undertaken. Broken pipes replaced; others repaired. All surfaces will be painted to prevent further deterioration.

CCTV

Having contacted the DAC, they referred me back to our insurers, as they had no preferred installer. Ecclesiastical Insurance our insurers recommends E-bound, who are the installer of our roof alarm system. I have therefore obtained a quote from them for this work.

New Memorial Ground

Sometime ago I had a conversation with Fr. Ben regarding my proposal to instigate a new memorial ground, near where the dust bins currently stand. I think we should now move this into a development stage, as our existing site is getting close to being full. It should not require any DAC involvement. Although clearance work will be necessary to clear the area. Discussion on preparation work will be reviewed at a latter PCC meeting.

The terrier inventory has been compiled for all the church ornaments, furniture, silver, hymn books, kneeler, candle stands etc.

Our existing outside tap needs to be repaired. Other than that, I have no further projects under review at this present time.

I commend this report to the PCC.

Tim Frost

Churchwarden and Clerk of Works

Choir Report

Both churches agreed to the purchase of a new anthem book for the choir. We have already sung anthems at church services over the year and are currently learning new ones.

Our choir, although small in number, are loyal and enthusiastic.

New members are most welcome. Rehearsals are at 7.30 on Friday evenings at Holy Innocents.

Chris Bartrop
Organist

Church Flowers

Following on from my last Report I now have 5 people on the Flower Rota due to illness and people moving away. In this day and age we don't need to carry out "flower arrangements" flowers in vases are quite acceptable. I am sure most people place flowers in vases at home so why can't they volunteer for church. The crux of the problem is lack of volunteers - fresh faces are much needed. Flowers purchased from Florists are very expensive but with numerous Supermarkets in BSE and the Market there are plenty of flowers at reasonable prices. Unless volunteers are forthcoming, I cannot see the current members continuing to carry out these duties and the Rota will dissolve. When I took over the Rota from Molly Ralph some 20 years ago I had at least 12 members on the list which with a 2-week duty was quite manageable but not now.

Wendy Jones

Fundraising: October 2024 and March 2025

Bingo was held in the Institute only once in 2024, on the evening of 5 October. There were 33 present, with a profit of £360.19. John Pitcher had many compliments for his cooking, particularly the excellent sausages. Peter Marsh kept the numbers rolling, Angela Pearce delivered the prizes, and Betty and Norman Blades manned the door and ran the raffle. Thanks to those who gave raffle prizes, and those who produced desserts. A good night was had by all.

The Edmundsbury Male Voice Choir Concert, 22 March 2025, was a great success. The choir was in good voice and kept us humming along and smiling. The profit to Holy Innocents Church was £1207.34, an excellent result which will go into our General Fund to help with running expenses. The profit was considerably boosted by the generous Sponsors who donated nearly the whole of the £450 fee charged by the Choir. Thanks to all who helped on the night by selling tickets, donating Draw prizes, selling the Draw tickets (£157, Richard. Fantastic!), running the bar, and contributing to the refreshments. There are plans for the Kirby Voices to perform at the Church on the 20th of December 2025. Put the date in your Diary.

Linda Scoles

PCC Secretary's Report

We have discussed a wide range of matters during the past year, meeting four times, with provision for a meeting of the Sub-Committee outside these times to discuss urgent matters. We discussed the handling of financial matters, with Peter Robinson and Betty Holdgate sharing the role with Kathy Drakes and the Finance Sub-Committee, discussing urgent matters outside the PCC meetings. Some of the proposals have come to fruition, others not, or not yet, but all of real interest. One important matter is the extensive refurbishment and renewal of the Church Institute which will serve the village as well as the Church and be an important part of our outreach. We plan to instal new doors and a welcoming lobby, accessible toilet and two other toilets, footpath to make the entrance accessible for wheelchairs users, storage area and various other improvements. We hope to get grants towards the cost and donations from village people and businesses, and we have received donations and legacies which already cover a considerable part of the cost – which is estimated to be about £70,000. We are very grateful to Graham Mothersole for all he has done to help us develop this project.

We are very grateful to Fr. Ben and everyone on the PCC for what they have given us during the past year, and our warm thanks go to everyone who participates in the multi-faceted aspects of the Parish's life. We look forward to an interesting year ahead, with trust that God will guide us as we put our trust in Him and do our best

Jane Dalton

GDPR

Very little change with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) . However, we must continue to ensure that we do not share personal information, without prior written consent. When sending an email to multiple addresses please use the BCC function. This way all addresses are hidden. We should also remember that if an officer of the Church, e.g. Church Warden, Treasurer, Secretary, Electoral Roll Officer, Safeguarding Officer, or anyone leaving the Church, that holds personal information. We must ensure that this information is deleted from their computers and hard copies destroyed or returned to the Church. The Data Protection Co-ordinator must also receive confirmation from the member that this has been done. A copy of this confirmation should be held on file.

Benefice Website and Facebook

Our website and Facebook pages continue to be an important part of communication for our churches. Great Barton is likely to be a fast-growing village, and most new residents will be young families, which look for their news and information online. So, to reach these new people, we must continue to utilise our Social Media pages and websites. We are receiving extremely good numbers of people viewing the Holy Innocents Facebook, especially if we can include photographs of events such as the Christmas Tree Festivals, Christmas lunch at Meeting Point, social events, or concerts. We also share information on our news and events on the media pages of surrounding village organisations, which gives us a much wider coverage.

Our figures for views on the website continue to be encouraging, but we need to ensure that we continue to update our pages on a regular basis with new and exciting news and events. Please keep the information coming.

The Messenger

Unfortunately, we have discontinued The Messenger, both as a magazine and a website. We had advertised for someone to step forward to take this role on, but sadly, we have not had anyone respond.

Electoral Roll

Every 6 years the Roll is renewed, 2025 is the renewal year, which has now been completed.

I have prepared two versions of the Roll; the Porch copy which has names only and the Record copy which has both names and addresses. If the renewed Roll is approved by the APCM the Porch Copy can then be displayed in the church porch. Anyone who now wishes to be added after the 8th April, can do so once the APCM have approved the new roll. The Record Copy will be held by the Electoral Roll Officer, Fr Ben and the PCC Secretary. This has been our approach for some years now, it embodies the spirit of data protection.

Details of the new Roll:

The details below are from the renewed Electoral Roll, which was completed on April 8th, 2025.

Resident in the Parish 48

Non-resident 7

Total 55

Upon approval by the APCM I will:

Place a copy of the Public Copy on the church noticeboard.
Advise the diocesan office of the new roll numbers.
Send an email copy of the Record Copy to Fr Ben.
Peter Robinson

Great Barton and Thurston Tower Bells 2024 – 2025

Another year has passed, and it's time to tell you about the happenings in our two Bell Towers.

Along with ringers from other towers, we have a practice at Great Barton on Thursday evenings from 7.30 – 9 pm, and then, on Friday evenings, we alternate our practice between Rougham and Pakenham.

On Sunday mornings we ring at either Great Barton or Thurston except on the third Sunday when we ring at Pakenham and Rougham. We have only missed three Sundays in the past year when we couldn't ring at any of the above towers, which shows the dedication of our group of ringers. I'm afraid we have to alternate ringing on Special occasions as I haven't got twelve or at a push, ten ringers, to be able to ring at both churches at the same time. On 10th March 2024, we rang at Thurston for Mothering Sunday, and on 30th March 2025 we rang at Great Barton for Mothering Sunday. The same happens for Easter, Harvest and Remembrance. We had a very busy Christmas Eve where four of us, with different plus two's, rang at all four Services – the crib services at 2 pm and 4 pm, the Midnight Services at 9 pm and 11.30 pm, and then stayed for Midnight Communion at Great Barton.

Over the year we rang for eight Weddings and one Christening at various churches. Three of these being at Thurston, one at Great Barton. We didn't enter the Guild Striking Competition this year as we had two Weddings, one at each Church, on that afternoon and couldn't guarantee to get back in time. We had three visiting teams of ringers at Great Barton and one at Thurston, and several Quarter Peals were rung including one at each Church dedicated to the memory of Gill Rood, and one at Great Barton for the 80th Anniversary of D Day.

On Monday 1st April 2024, we went on an outing to five towers in Norfolk with a Pub Lunch at the Old Bell in Saham Toney – it was very well supported with 32 sitting down for lunch, a very enjoyable day.

We have another outing arranged for Easter Bank Holiday Monday, and will be ringing for the 80th Anniversary of VE Day on the 8th May.

That concludes my report for this year.

Sally Veal Tower Captain Great Barton and Thurston

Mothers' Union

Currently we have 22 members including 4 indoor members.

Since the last report sent to you two of our longstanding members have died : Pat Humphry, who had been a member for about sixty years, and Pat Sheppard who led the Gt Barton Branch for many years until we joined together. Both are greatly missed.

We continue to meet on the second Tuesday of each month, but agreed to meet at 11.00 am all year and in the Rock unless we need more space.

During 2024 we welcomed speakers on various subjects including the Holy Land, the Poems of John Betjeman, and the Rural Coffee Caravan.

We enjoyed making Easter cards with Sheila and Vonnie, and shared in a Bible Study led by Kathy Drakes.

We welcomed Clare and Penny from the Diocese who brought the M.U. Enterprises Stall. Penny gave an informative talk about autism.

Some of us lunched at the Victoria in July, and in September Father Ben led our Communion Service at Holy Innocents Church.

At our December meeting we made decorations for Christmas trees to be displayed in both churches.

We arranged the World Day of Prayer service, written by the Christian women of Palestine, held in the Rock in March.

We continue to advertise our meetings in the Gt Barton and Thurston Village Newsletters and the Church Pew Sheet, but numbers attending have dropped considerably in recent months due to illness and transport difficulties.

Gill Flower