

## CHURCH, ART AND COMMUNITY IN THE LINCOLNSHIRE FENS

They stand back now, a little reserved as the world rushes by. Their spires no longer twinkle on the waters. Fen and marsh have been drained; the sea pushed back. But still these old churches faithfully mark the havens where people have lived and worked, loved and died, for thousands of years.

The Light Ships celebrates the place of the church in the life of fenland villages, through the words of those who know them best. More than 100 people have contributed to this portrait of the church as an architectural marvel, a house of small treasures and—always—the heart of a living community. Their different perspectives reflect each person's beliefs, histories and relationship with the church. In these pages, illustrated by new photographs, you can hear something of what the church means to people here, today.

The Light Ships was created by François Matarasso for Transported, which works to increase arts opportunities in Boston and South Holland. Proceeds from sales of this book go to support the churches and local arts activities.

£5

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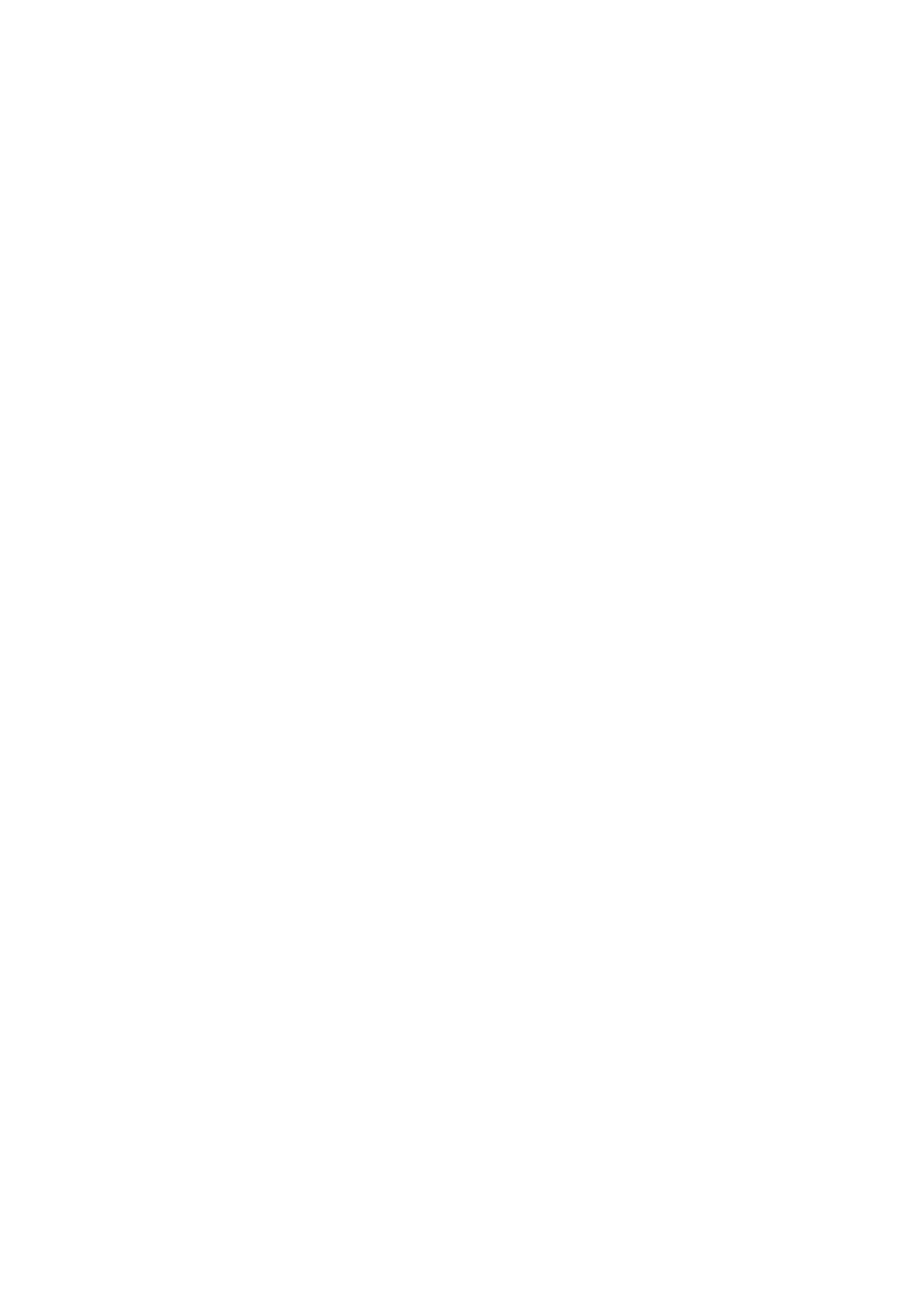


# THE LIGHT SHIPS

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François Matarasso

TRANSPORTED





# The Light Ships

Church, art and community  
in the Lincolnshire Fens

François Matarasso

Regular Marvels  
Transported 2014

Regular Marvel No. 4, November 2014

The first edition of *The Light Ships* included 130 numbered copies reserved for the people who shared in its creation, of which this is:

No.

For:

## THE LIGHT SHIPS

### Church, art and community in the Lincolnshire Fens

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Designed by Dave Everitt & François Matarasso  
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# THE LIGHT SHIPS

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## FOREWORD

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There are probably as many books about English churches as there are English churches. Every aspect of these wonderful buildings—architecture, history, religion, art etc.—has been exhaustively documented, while monographs on such items as stained glass, tombs and brasses abound. And visitors to individual churches will usually find excellent guidebooks by local historians.

This book, which has often drawn on those works, has a different purpose. Drawing on a handful of villages in the Lincolnshire Fens, it explores what the church means to the people who use and care for it today—the community of which it is both the creation and the embodiment. The building and its furnishings may change, but its place in enabling people to come together, to mark events, to worship, to create and to make sense of life, remains constant.

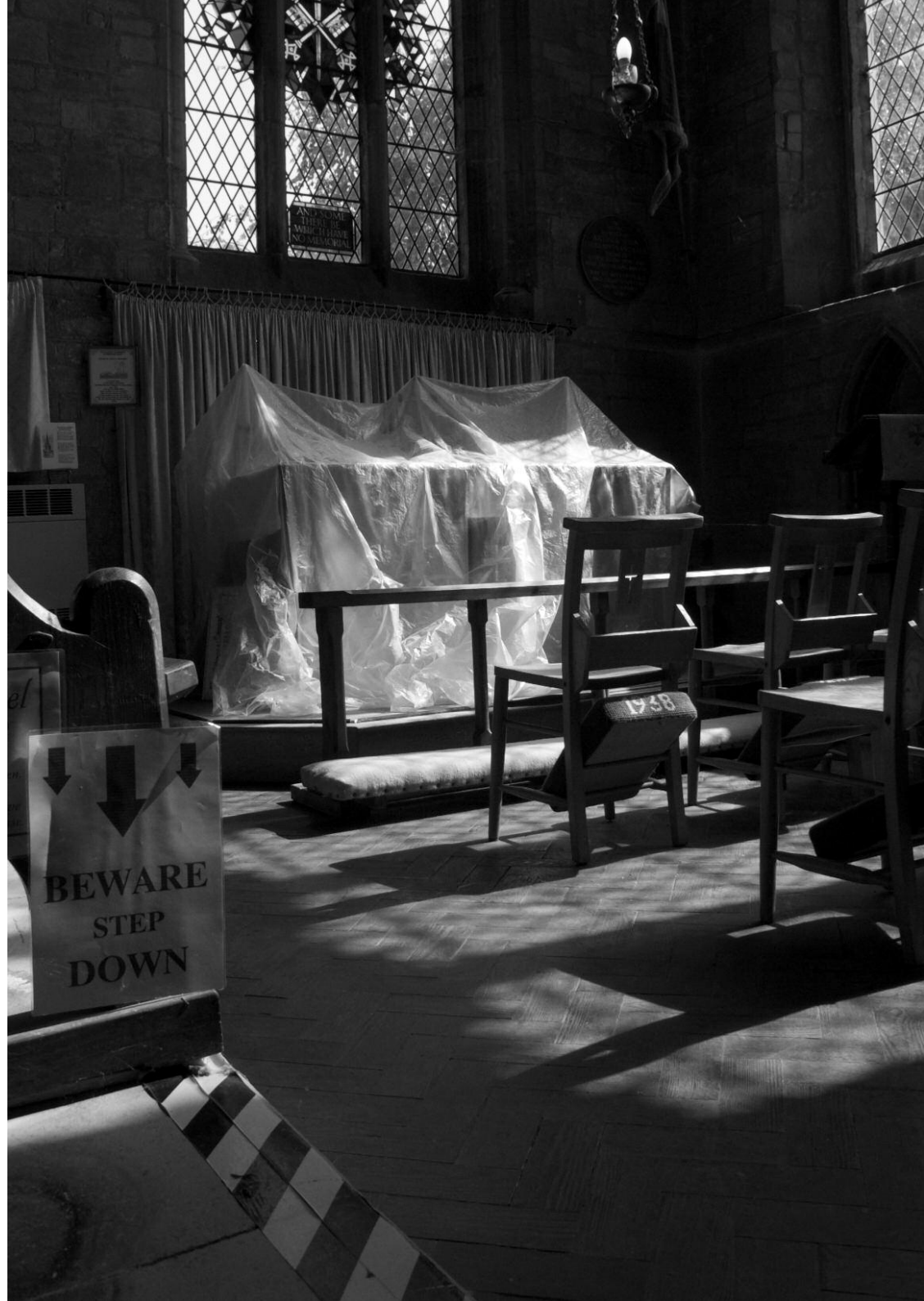
*The Light Ships* is a community arts project commissioned by Transported, a local arts programme which aims to get more people in Boston and South Holland enjoying and participating in the arts. It has involved well over a hundred local people, and in the central part of the book, they tell their own stories, in their own words. Only the framing texts, the photographs and the editing are my work. More details of the project, and much material not included here, can be found at: [thelightships.com](http://thelightships.com)



Lincolnshire's fenland churches are an extraordinary legacy, built up over the course of a millennium by thousands upon thousands of ordinary people. From the largest to the humblest, the oldest to the newest, they are all different, shaped by and reflecting the distinctive character of each community, each village. They have artworks that would be locked in a London museum if they weren't cemented to the church, and they have children's paintings too—and everything between. They are community buildings on which each generation has left its mark; majestic and moving, ancient and modern; inexhaustible, cherishable treasure houses where there is always something new to see, to admire and to be thankful for.

François Matarasso

November 2014





I: TWO THIRDS OF  
EVERY EYEFUL SKY

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M. W. Barley (1952)

It is commonly thought that Lincolnshire is flat. The Lincolnshire man's rebuttal takes a double form: first, the county is not flat, and second, if it is flat, that flatness is the essence of its character and particular beauty.



If you know the Lincolnshire Fenlands only from the windows of a car or a bus, you may not think very much of them. The landscape is neither dramatic nor picturesque: no mountains, lakes or pretty villages to catch the eye. On each side of the straight road stretch equally straight lines of cabbages, beet and potatoes, interrupted only by glasshouses, bungalows and truck stops hedged with flags. This is working land, in working gear. It is very productive though: much of what we eat grows in these fields, in rich earth won from water. Workers bend over crops in the morning mist, picking, weighing and packing. A steady convoy of trailers rumbles out from farm, store and factory so that our supermarket shelves are never bare. Its waterways are also straight and functional. Their names—Forty Foot Drain, New River—don't stop for poetry as they hurry rainwater out to sea. Above them, pylons stalk into the distance like tent pegs for the sky. Turbines lazily harvest the wind. And higher still, jet contrails draw the straightest lines of all across this land of levels and right angles.

If you know the Lincolnshire Fenlands only from a distance, you may not think much of them at all. But if you stop, if you turn off the trunk routes that connect Newark with Kings Lynn or Peterborough with Skegness, you find another Fenland, ancient, self-reliant and rich in unexpected treasure.

The spires are the clue. They pierce the horizon through little stands of trees. Like lighthouses across a still sea, church steeples signal where people live to those who rush by with places to go, people to see. They are fixed points in a busy world: pointedly pointless. They have stood a very, very long time and they have seen it all.

They saw the first motor cars, and the traction engines before them. They saw the Lincolnshire Loop Line built between Boston and Spalding, and they saw its tracks pulled up and its course buried under tarmac. Before that, they saw people pass on horseback and on foot, in carts and wagons and stage coaches. And before the roads were built and banked, they saw ships and skiffs, boats and punts, because you could never be sure where the water stopped and the land started. It's said that 29 different rivers make their way towards the Wash and they all have to cross this land to reach the cold North Sea. That's a lot of water, even when it doesn't come in the other way, salty on storms and spring tides.

To get safely from Lincolnshire into Norfolk, across those shifting water courses, you'd want a guide. In Long Sutton churchyard is the weathered gravestone of the last man to earn a living by piloting travellers across the Wash, before a bridge was built over the Nene in 1830. St Mary's gleaming silver spire would have been the landmark he looked for on his way home.



Alec Clifton-Taylor (1987)

On a spire, 'standing like a frosted spear against the sky', even very white lead is quite acceptable. Some English spires were covered with lead at a very early date, but the oldest have long ago perished. The doyen of the survivors is that at Long Sutton in Lincolnshire.

It was not only the dangers of losing one's way or one's footing that made crossing the Fens dangerous. In St Mary's itself is the tomb of a physician killed by robbers on his way home from attending a patient at Tydd St Mary in 1795. On the slab is written simply 'Alas! poor BAILEY'. Nowadays, the principle risk is road traffic.

There can be few parts of England whose appearance has changed as much as the Fens. The project of winning this fertile soil from the sea was begun in earnest by the Romans, and it continued



throughout the Middle Ages, the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the industrial age and the modern. It continues still. The Fens have not been drained—they are *being* drained. The ground seems solid enough beneath those 44-tonne lorries laden with potatoes, but if the pumps stopped, nature would soon restore her dominion.

The winter storms of 2013–14 showed how fragile is man's hold. On the other side of the country, in the Somerset Levels, 17,000 acres of farmland lay under water for over a month; Muchelney could be reached only by boat and Thorney was evacuated.

This year, the people of Fishtoft, by Boston, celebrate the church's 900<sup>th</sup> anniversary. But a millennium is a blink of nature's eye: everything changes, including climate.

William Camden (1607)

This Holland hath in it foul and slabby quagmires, and most troublesome fens, which the very inhabitants themselves for all their stilts cannot stalk through. And considering that it lies very low and flat, fenced it is of the one side against the Ocean, on the other with mighty piles and huge banks which the people watch with great care and much fear, as against a dangerous enemy.

During those 900 years, banks and dykes were raised, drains dug and washes made for sacrificial flooding across the low-lying lands between Boston and Cambridge. Windmills, pumps and sluices were built, and then rebuilt, as the water smashed them down or technology improved. And on the sandy silt banks that separated freshwater fen and saltwater marsh, a few feet above sea level was enough for settlements to grow and prosper. It was not just good farming that made them rich: here was everything that wetlands could offer—fish, eels, duck and geese; salt to be got from seawater; peat for burning, rushes for thatch and grass for fattening stock.

And there was always the sea, which brought trade with towns along the coast, with York and London, and with Holland, Scandinavia and the Hanseatic League. On these resources the people of this unusual, sometimes dangerous, world thrived.

You can see it in their churches—huge, splendid, elegant halls, capable of sheltering far greater numbers than ever lived there. In the old salt-making port of Wrangle, now several miles from the sea; at Swineshead, where a great abbey once stood too; at Quadring, half a mile from its own village; at Pinchbeck, a brisk walk from the centre of Spalding—in village after village stand vast 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century churches of the highest sophistication and beauty.

It is just 13 miles from Spalding to Long Sutton as the geese fly, and a little more along the silt ridge that once kept fen from marsh and sea. From Spalding, the road takes you eastwards to Weston and then on to Moulton, Whaplode, Holbeach, Fleet and Gedney before you reach Long Sutton itself: a church every two miles. And what churches: eight splendid buildings, each with its own character and treasures, none more cherishable than the next. Articulated lorries now cross the dried marsh but anyone coming here by boat in 1400 would have seen a chain of spires on the southern shore, each one marking a proud and prosperous community.

Henry Thorold (1989)

No satisfactory explanation for the existence of these gigantic churches—built, after all, for a very small community of ‘yellow-bellies’—has ever been found [...] Wherever you go in the Fens, there is a tremendous church: they sail past like ships at sea.

Almost everything has changed since then, except human nature and the mystery of being alive. The waters have gone and, though the land still supports the communities of the former fens, today’s way of life has less and less to do even with yesterday’s. Machines pass where men once followed animals; villagers drive away each morning to work in distant offices or factories.

Almost everything has changed—and yet the churches are still there, battered a little by the storms of history, but still there. Stones put together five or eight hundred years ago have not moved. Oak carved into the shape of a flower or a dog still delights. Walls that have echoed with song and vows and pleas return the same sound today. The difference is in how we see them.



The churches show their age. Their towers lean worryingly on the soft Fenland earth. At Sutton St. James, the nave was lost entirely during the Commonwealth and the bell-tower stands far from the chancel, sheltered by trees. Their fabric may be bruised and repaired. The walls of Cowbit church, a humble building almost hidden behind a great dyke, are a lovely patchwork of stone and brick. And they have lost many of the artistic treasures they once had. All that’s left of Swineshead’s riches is a list of what was sold, smashed or burned in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. But they have gained additions and new treasures too: a Victorian chancel and a 20<sup>th</sup> century screen at Moulton Chapel, iron gates at Holbeach St. Johns.

The guidebooks praise Wrangle’s 14<sup>th</sup> century stained glass, a rare survival due to its having been buried in hope of more tolerant times. One day they may also celebrate the glass paid for a few years ago by Harry Clark and made by Gordon Monaghan. It shows the church and the farming life of the village, Mr Clark on

his tractor and domestic animals to delight young children for decades to come; in one discreet corner is a rose commemorating Diana, Princess of Wales, killed as the window was being made.

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John Betjeman (1938)

The old church struggles on. Your great-great-grandfather would recognise it. The proportions are probably the same: some windows, some carving, some tombs, some woodwork would remind him of the place he knew, before he closed his eyes in the big box pew and slumbered away the Parson's elevating sermon.

These churches are great ships faithfully bearing their communities across oceans of time. On taking possession, each generation has made the changes that seemed right to them: raising the roof, enlarging windows, adding a spire. And a few decades or centuries after, their work has been undone, changed or conserved.

Sometimes there was religious fervour—in the Reformation when statues and stained glass were smashed and wall-paintings white-washed, and in Victorian times when, at Fishtoft, Quadring and elsewhere much was spent to recreate that lost colour and symbolism. Sometimes it was just life changing, as it does. The installation of a clock in the Gosberton church tower, probably in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century, must have been a source of local wonder and pride; today, the hands obey a synchronous motor and the old mechanism is preserved in a glass case in the nave: time passing.

When these churches were built the congregation stood during services. Sometimes, though—as at Moulton—there are stone seats around pillars, presumably for the old. Later, pews were installed and the village's social hierarchy was reflected in where you sat and how much you paid for the seat. Then pews became unfashionable and some were taken out. New heating kept the chill off. At the

turn of the second millennium, the village church was renewing its old vocation as community centre. Luckily, these great Fenland halls with their wide aisles and transepts had plenty of space for kitchens and toilets and meeting rooms.

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Simon Jenkins (1999)

For many people today, the church is no more than a tapering spire rising above a skirt of trees and cottage roofs. It marks an ancient settlement and symbolises an ancient conformity. Manor house, vicarage and schoolroom are gathered round the old churchyard, as if for security in a hostile world. Gravestones lie tipsy amid ryegrass and sedge. The church enclave seems marginalised, an architecture too important for its present purposes, coming to life only for the rituals of marriage, christening and funeral.

Church attendance (if not necessarily faith) is at a low ebb now, and these great buildings can seem out of place. The modern world rumbling past on the A road has more pressing concerns, margins and delivery schedules, people to see and places to get to. The flashing spires just mark where some people live, off the beaten track, gone and already forgotten.

For some travellers these great buildings are no more than relics of a superstitious time, devoid of purpose in a rational world. The minority who have an interest in medieval art or local history may value them, like Simon Jenkins, as 'a dispersed gallery of vernacular art' or 'a Museum of England'. The faithful, a small word that encompasses whole worlds, resist that interpretation, which takes little account of the intentions of the church's builders, nor of those who use and maintain it today.

And then there are those whose faith in progress, art and God is equally lacking, uncertain, sketchy or otherwise hard to express—the many for whom a church may be a mystery, but one which is a present reminder that life itself is also a mystery. Like beached arks from another time, churches still elicit wonder and discomfort, as they always have, because they make us question what is and what matters.

Perhaps that is their lasting and their greatest gift.





## 2: THE LIGHT SHIPS

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Your heart goes out to those old Bostonians who, weary of the Lincolnshire levels and the flat ocean, made up their minds to build and build into the blue. If God could not give them height, they would give it to him.

J. B. Priestley

<b>Bicker</b>	St. Swithun
<b>Boston</b>	St. Botolph
<b>Cowbit</b>	St. Mary
<b>Crowland Abbey</b>	St. Mary, St. Bartholomew & St. Guthlac
<b>Fishtoft</b>	St. Guthlac
<b>Gosberton</b>	St. Peter & St. Paul
<b>Holbeach St. Johns</b>	St. John Baptist
<b>Moulton</b>	All Saints
<b>Moulton Chapel</b>	St. James
<b>Pinchbeck</b>	St. Mary
<b>Quadring</b>	St. Margaret of Antioch
<b>Sutton St. James</b>	St. James
<b>Swineshead</b>	St. Mary
<b>Whaplode</b>	St. Mary
<b>Wrangle</b>	St. Mary & St. Nicholas

## FENLAND CHURCHES

BOSTON

Ernie Napier

People do regard it as a cathedral. We're just a normal parish church, but the vision of the people who built it must have been extraordinary.

*'It's all seeped into the stones'*

WRANGLE

George Danby

The lady who used to organise the event we have for the church had a theme each year. One year, she said, 'The first thing we noticed, when we moved here, was that whichever windows we looked out, all we could see was cabbage, cauliflowers and potatoes, so that's going to be the theme'. I said to her, 'Well, it's what you can see out of the window because of the quality of the soil: it's the most fertile land in the country.' So I wrote a poem called *This Wonderful Land*, all about the land and the crops.

THORPE ON THE HILL

David Stocker

People think of the Fens as being a boggy, unapproachable morass, with a small number of rather odd people. The opposite is the case. Even though they were only a couple of metres higher than the waterlogged area, the places on the silt ridge—the land which runs down through Boston to Long Sutton, with Spalding and Crowland off it—were amongst the biggest and richest parishes in the





country. They had a very large population, and a very large amount of money compared with just about everywhere else, which is why, when you drive along that road from Long Sutton and then up towards Wrangle, what you see in every parish, almost every mile, is a church that is amongst the biggest, the most richly decorated, the most lavish buildings of their date in the country.

GOSBERTON  
Ian Walters

The stone was brought by river barge from quarries at least 25 miles away. When I look at the carvings and the windows, I'm full of awe at the people who expressed their feelings and religious ideas in this wonderful work. The spire is tremendous: why they would want to build that high in this flat land?

CROWLAND  
An Abbey Guide

Even when you sit here on your own, it doesn't have an eerie feel; it just feels calm. You'd think—especially in the winter when it's quite dark—that you would feel alarmed or uncomfortable, but you don't.

BICKER  
Elizabeth Benjamin

It's a homely church—peaceful, more than anything.

SWINESHEAD  
Jane Robertson

When we first came in, it had a very prayerful feel. I'm sure a lot of churches are prayerful, but this particular church had quite an impact.

COWBIT  
Mary Haresign

I was overawed by the feeling of prayer—that prayers had been said here for centuries. I still feel that. I come every day to unlock and lock the church. When I come in, it's so peaceful, so holy. To be able to come here every Sunday and take part in worship is very special.

CROWLAND  
An Abbey Guide

When you think that prayers have been said here since 716, that is such an achievement. I think that's why it's got such a wonderful atmosphere. It's all seeped into the stones.

FISHTOFT

Angela Gilbert, Lay Reader

There's a feeling of God's presence, especially in the chancel. It's my second home. I couldn't not come to Fishtoft church. I feel I can work for God here.

MOULTON CHAPEL

Peg Fountain

I daren't tell you: it's not my favourite church at all. I like a church like Cowbit—traditional, grey walls, not too big—and not these great big churches, like Holbeach: that's too high.

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

Some churches feel very cold when you go into them: kind of austere. This church has a much warmer quality I think. All my kids have grown up here. When we came, my eldest was five: she's twenty-three now and was just married in this church.

MOULTON CHAPEL

Anne Brown

The church is lovely when it's full, especially if people are upstairs and we're singing: it's beautiful, it really is. It's got its own character because it's so small. It feels like a family church to me.

GOSBERTON

Tony Quinton

You walk through the door and it's got that warmth. You feel it as you go down through the church. I love the old schoolroom, which is the Lady Chapel, with the 'Road to Emmaus' window. That's got a bit of ethereal magic and spirituality to it. You think of all the people who have passed through this place and left a piece of themselves here, in the fabric. Just sitting here, with the peace, the quiet and the sunlight: it's a bit of heaven, with the door shut.



WHAPLODE

Alison Ward

June happened to be here when we came, and she kindly allowed us up the bell tower. It was a magical experience, going up through all these old layers to the roof, and then looking down on the church and realising how old it was, and all the history involved.

WRANGLE

Mark Weatherby

You walk into any church in Lincolnshire and no two are the same.

MOULTON

Julie Timings

All the churches I serve are different. They each have their own special distinctiveness. There is a great love for this church, that is a lot to do with the history and people's connection with it. The stories live on: they're picked up by people and carried further.

Samuel H. Miller (1890)

WHAPLODE. Here is the most glorious E. Eng. tower, standing upon an exceedingly well conceived base adjoining the southernmost bay of the south aisle. In every particular of symmetry, construction, details and material, this is by far the most perfect specimen of architecture in the Deanery of Holland.

PINCHBECK  
Elizabeth Sneath

It's stately, it's gracious; it's a wonderful place. But it's not just the building—there are some marvellous people in the church, so we're incredibly lucky in both respects.

WRANGLE  
Geoff Barnett

The church means everything in my life, for the community: yes, it does: definitely. It's a beautiful building. I'm very passionate about it and the grounds.

WHAPLODE  
Cyril Hearn

I love this church: you can't change my colours.

*'These colossal churches, in colossal parishes'*

THORPE ON THE HILL  
David Stocker

The Fenland made its money because it provided resources that other parts of the country couldn't—waterfowl, reeds, turf for burning and salt. In addition, there's beautiful grassland for fattening stock. And if all that wasn't enough, they grew corn, because the sandy silt is fantastically fertile. So with all this, the people in the Fenland parishes are doing very nicely in the Middle Ages. That's why they can afford these colossal churches, in colossal parishes that extend as much ten miles from one end to the other, though they might be only a mile wide.

BOSTON  
Luke Skerritt

There was a massive amount of trade with lowland Europe and the Baltic States in the late 1200s and throughout the 1300s. Boston was exporting three million fleeces a year, at a time when wool was worth phenomenal amounts of money.

THORPE ON THE HILL  
David Stocker

The only big port is Boston, which trades in wool, and it has an economy that's distinct from the countryside. St. Botolph's Fair is held in Boston and it's one of the most important in Europe. It's colossal. It attracts merchants from all over Europe to buy English wool and cloth. The town quadruples in size for a couple of months when the fair is on.

BOSTON  
Ernie Napier

In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Boston was the second largest port in the country. There was a lot of money in the town for it was this trade that



provided the finance to build a church such as this. Half London closed down when the merchants came to the fairs at that time.

BOSTON  
Luke Skerritt

This wool trade wealth is funnelled into building grand churches, sometimes in quite humble, small villages. The barn like structures, the size of the nave and the type of roof they're putting in—it's not just a celebration of God: there's an element of demonstrating magnificence and importance and wealth.

THORPE ON THE HILL  
David Stocker

The chancel, the eastern end of the church, is the responsibility of the patron: the aristocracy or the Church. The nave, on the other hand, belongs to the people, and almost anyone can do work there, though inevitably it's the wealthier members of the community who do, and, of course, it all serves to demonstrate how superior



they are. But in the Fens, you do find a lot of contributions from people of a middling sort. By the 16th century, there would be wills leaving a pound, two pounds or five pounds for repair of the church, or building the tower, or the bells. Quite often that gift can be seen in the fabric and the art, because if you've paid for a window, you fill it with your heraldry. If you're paying for an arch, you have a carving of your coat of arms, or your merchant's mark, or a favourite beast. Maybe your nickname is 'the bear', so you have a bear.

Dorothy M. Owen (1971)

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In Surfleet in 1420 there was a master mason Roger Denys [who] agreed with Mr Adlard Welby, rector there, to take down the choir or chancel and rebuild it on the foundations of the old, having first satisfied himself that they were sufficient and suitable. It was to have seven windows [...] Each light was to have a figure and text and be of English glass.

THORPE ON THE HILL

David Stocker

People decide something needs to be rebuilt, or they feel they're prosperous enough, or the church is getting too small, or it's simply not impressive enough for their wishes. You get the distinct impression that the motivation for undertaking a big rebuild is because the church in the next village has just done it. So you get this competitive church building, but it's a game only the wealthiest communities can afford. In the Fens, of course, they can all afford it, so they're all doing it. In Long Sutton you see this wonderful spire going up, and you can imagine the people at Fleet, in the next parish, thinking, 'We'll have one of those, but in stone'. Then in Moulton, they will say, 'Look at what Fleet have done: we'll have an even bigger one', and so on. You can see this cannoning down the landscape as these churches compete with one another to have the next feature, the smartest thing, to be the biggest, and the grandest, and the most expensive—and all because they can afford it.

Simon Jenkins (1999)

The twin glories of the village of Moulton are its windmill and its church tower. The former, now without its sails, is or was reputedly the tallest in England. The latter is one of the most ornamented steeples in Lincolnshire. The western aspect is lush, with niches and panels rising to battlements and square pinnacles. These are topped by flying buttresses supporting a crocketed spire with lucarnes.

THORPE ON THE HILL

David Stocker

The big projects attract lots of masons, and go on longer than most masons' whole careers. If you want to become a mason you might start as an apprentice at Lincoln Cathedral. After some years you'll

be sufficiently skilled and have enough contacts to sell your services elsewhere, so you go and work on some parish church. Masons would go great distances to work on the most prestigious projects, for the largest amounts of money. They're right at the top of the artisan tree. And from time to time they get beyond actually cutting stone, and become the supervisors of people who cut stones. And sometimes they own quarries and ultimately do design work, because that is a rarefied, top end. So you can climb the tree and become what we would now call an architect, and we have plenty of information about those masons.

Lincolnshire Old Churches Trust (1981)

The master mason, if the stone was dressed at the quarry to save the expense of transport for waste material, would send one or two masons to do the work. Their marks on the stone were the guarantee of its quality, both he and they depended upon this mutual recognition and trust that the mason mark implies.

THORPE ON THE HILL

David Stocker

They just started building. Even in buildings as highly designed as Lincoln Cathedral, you can see that the design changes in all sorts of critical ways. But when you've built the first pier, the next has to be the same height as the first one. And if you've established a bay width, then you probably want to maintain that width. Although a mason starts with the hope of doing the entire building with a single design, in practice the money runs out, or someone dies and there's a halt. Then when they pick it up again, time has passed and it's being done piecemeal. They will copy what was there before, to the best of their ability, but you find enormous variation in the details. The mason's principal concern was to fulfil the contract and please his client—not to generate the most up-to-

date, innovative, individualistic design. The patrons aren't interested in the latest style as such, anyway: they're not being connoisseurs. They want something that looks nice, and that people will assure them is in good taste and the right thing to do. They are trying to make the very best offering to the Church they can with their resources.

J. Charles Cox (1916)

QUADRING. The church (St Margaret) has a fairly close resemblance to its neighbour at Gosberton; the tower and spire are well-proportioned and the clerestory imposing.



SWINESHEAD  
Charles Robertson

The churches would have been much more open, with no pews, and people would congregate in the nave. The priest was paid to do the priest's job, which was to pray for the people. So the altar was at the east and he stood facing God, to act as the bridge between God and his people. It must have been such a beautiful, atmospheric place to come into: dim, with a steep pitched roof and no clerestory, a judgement scene over the chancel arch, with flickering light playing upon the faces and paintings around the pillars and the walls—an atmosphere of mysterious majesty and awe, to bring an ethereal sense of your life and the possibility of heaven. Everything depended on the preacher. There was the guy whose glass was half empty, who'd say, 'Oh, it's a narrow gateway'. But then you'd get the one who sees it half-full, saying 'Well, actually, it's just the size of a fellow going through called Jesus. That's why it's that shape. Don't worry, because you can go through, too.'



FISHTOFT  
Marc Cooper

The Rev. Holdsworth made massive changes in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some of which, like the heating system, we're really thankful for. They put the pews in and the vestry; and took all the plaster off the walls because, with gas lighting and then electricity, they didn't need the reflective quality of a white interior. They changed the levels of the flooring—the Victorians were very keen on the idea of going up to the altar. We've been quite lucky, though, with the versatility of our chancel. There are churches so chock-full of Victorian furniture that you can't really use the chancel, unless you do it in a sort of monastic way with people facing each other. In the 1960s they put in the room at the back, which was quite innovative. It's been very useful having a kitchen and toilet. There are plenty of churches that haven't got them even now, but as congregations get older, so do their needs increase. The spirit's willing, but the flesh is weak, sadly!

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Jack Yates & Henry Thorold (1965)

FISHTOFT: The smooth-stone church has plain west tower and some clear-glassed windows to the aisles: others are drearily glazed. Spacious, but scraped with dark pointing. But as a landscape feature, among elms and fields, it is proper mediaeval, marshland architecture.

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THORPE ON THE HILL

David Stocker

The church, in its very diffuse fabric, reflects the variation and incoherence of communities grappling with all the issues of life. It's an expression of the community not at any one moment, but how that community has coped over a long period of time. So it may reflect periods of great optimism and prosperity, and periods of anxiety and an introverted perspective. But those changes are much clearer in other parts of Lincolnshire than in the Fens, because of the quality, scale, and continual rebuilding that goes on in the Fenland churches.

*'It just gets you thinking':*  
Through children's eyes

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Nikolaus Pevsner (1964)

COWBIT: A confusing church. It is Perp., of brick, with low walls but signs of a much higher former roof [...] The only certain signs of a much earlier church are the enormous stones re-used in the south porch side walls and the heads from a corbel table re-used for the chancel roof.

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MILLIE

When I started reception, I went in that church and I thought it was really big, because I'd never been in a church before.

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LIAM

I was quite intrigued because I saw lots of gargoyles on the outside and inside. I was intrigued to know when they were made and how. It must have been a job to model them because they didn't have the technology we have today. It would have been all done by hand. Everyone knows it's a peaceful kind of place. Why have a scary guy or gargoyle?

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LIA

It is the fact that it's God's house that makes it different from any other building. People pray there. People wouldn't pray in a restaurant or their work places—some people might, but it's not something that you'd see every day.

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ROSIE

I like the stained glass window with Jesus walking on water. All his disciples were on a boat and then it started being really stormy and they saw Jesus coming towards them. Then he said, 'Don't

worry. It's just me.' Then Peter went to walk on water but he lost his faith in Jesus, so he started sinking. Then Jesus helped him back on the boat.

DANIEL

I like the big chair at the back which is sort of like a throne. It's got a little engraving at the top. And also behind the altar, there are these numbers. I'm not sure whether they're a date or anything but I'm intrigued to find out.

LIA

You're so curious because you don't know what any of it is about; when it was made; who made it. It just gets you thinking. The other day our class went out in the graveyard, and we looked for the oldest dates we could find to make a character out of the people we saw. And we found an evacuee's gravestone, from London, and it said 'Age Unknown'.

DANIEL

If you mention the name to someone, they won't go, 'Oh, yes, I know where that is', because it's just a small village and quite unknown and hidden, and I like that. It makes it special.

LIA

You wouldn't come into Cowbit and see all the history that's there. If people are driving past, they wouldn't think, 'Oh, that's very interesting'. But if they came and actually had a look around, they would really understand about it.

## MEMORIES

### *'You sat still in those days'*

Hilary Healy (2000)

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MOULTON CHAPEL, St James. On the site of a medieval chapel of ease, this is an octagonal structure (1722) by William Sands Senior of Spalding. It retains his paneled gallery and some benches and its marble font with painted cover

MOULTON CHAPEL  
Peg Fountain

You had your own seat in those days and you sat still. My Dad used to sit at the end, I was next; then my brother, my sister, and my Mother, and then there was an old man. He had a sweet shop, old Joe Wright, and during the sermon he would pass a sweet all the way down the pew. I was only five or six.

BICKER  
Elizabeth Benjamin

I must have been about three years old, because all I can remember is sitting with my Dad and hearing him sing; he liked the singing.

SUTTON ST. JAMES  
Janet Spinks

We used to like to get on the back pew, because we'd all had to walk to chapel in that cold. Mum and Dad would say, 'Well, you can sit on that seat providing you behave'. We only disgraced our-



selves once and, of course, that was the end of it. One of us had the wind and it rattled all the way along—that still makes me smile.

WRANGLE  
Linda Stones

I was born in Wrangle and christened in the church. I went to Sunday School there. It took place at the back of the church. We had little round dark wood tables and small chairs with blue seats. It was over 70 years ago.

WRANGLE  
George Danby

I started coming to Sunday School as a very young lad, looking up at the vicar in the pulpit and thinking how high up he was, and how magnificent to be up there. I didn't know that one day I would be Mayor of Boston, and have a chance to give one or two addresses from the pulpit myself.

MOULTON CHAPEL  
Anne Brown

Mothering Sunday always stands out: your mother and your aunts came. You went up to the altar to get some flowers and you took them to your mum and gave her a kiss.

MOULTON

We always went to church; and to the fetes and the outing to the seaside on the train. Mr Baxter, the horse slaughterer, treated the Sunday School to the pantomime every year. And there was always something going on at the vicarage. We were getting shows up every week.

SUTTON ST. JAMES  
Janet Spinks

We'd come home after Chapel in the morning, but we couldn't have a skipping rope out or do anything like that. Then we'd come back



for Sunday School in the afternoon. I got locked in one Sunday night, when it was dark. I didn't like the dark. My cousins shut me in, but they let me out after a bit, because they knew I would have broken a window. But I always remember it as a very, very happy place to come, and I wouldn't be anything else but a Baptist.

MOULTON  
John Biggadike

Everybody went to church, because there was nowhere else to go. The young folk used to go for a walk after church, and after chapel: that's how it all came about in those days. One old farmer friend of mine used to say that if someone married in the next village, they must have had a bike to get there.

MOULTON CHAPEL  
Anne Brown

Rev. Thomson used to ride round the village on a horse: he was quite a character. He was friendly and fine, but he wasn't like vicars

are now: there wasn't the personal touch there is today. Vicars then were like the policeman. You looked up to the vicar; you didn't say anything against them. Now they're more like a friend, aren't they?

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Lou Thorpe

There were six of us had never been christened and Father thought he'd take us all and get it over with, get it done with. So we got in the church and he said to the Vicar 'I'm so ashamed to bring all this lot in one go', but the Vicar said 'Mr Thorpe, happy is the man who's got a quiver full of these'.

MOULTON

The church used to be full on a Friday night for our Harvest Festival service. Everybody came. There were people who came to church all year round. All the farmers came and it was lovely—our traditional hymns. After the service we'd go to the community centre and have a buffet supper and the produce used to be auctioned, and it was just lovely. I wish we could get back to that.

BICKER  
Elizabeth Benjamin

It was bellringing on a Monday evening, choir practice on a Friday, Wednesday youth club at the village hall, which was run by the vicar. That's how it used to be, because most people worked on farms in the village then. The vicar would come in to school once a week, as well. So everything was centred around the church.

## *'I was brought up both ways'*

MOULTON  
John Biggadike

My mother was born in Weston and brought up to attend church, and in my youth my parents and I went to church on Sundays. Both my father's parents were staunch Methodists and attended Whaplode Chapel, together with their family (twelve children) every Sunday. Grandfather was a Trustee of the Chapel for many years. Occasionally Dad and I cycled to Whaplode Chapel for the Sunday service, which we both enjoyed. Sadly, the Methodist Chapel in Whaplode recently closed and is offered for sale.

SPALDING  
Joan Beba

There were about twelve of us at the church Sunday School, and it was so cold, so boring. But the Methodist chapel along the road was wonderful: they had sports day, anniversaries, teas... I used to plead with my mother to let me go, but she said, 'No, your Grandma would be so cross, you've got to go to church'; but I loved what the Methodists were doing.

Samuel H. Miller (1890)

GOSBERTON. There are three chapels in this village—Wesleyan, Baptist, and Free Methodist, 12 almshouses and valuable charities. It has a Public Hall for lectures, &c.

MOULTON

There was a Bun Feast and you could go and get a bun. The vicar used to say, 'Are you church or are you chapel?' If you were church, you'd get a bun and if you were chapel, 'No bun for you, my child'.



BICKER  
Sandra Dawson

I went to the Baptist Church from being a baby, but my mother-in-law and the family all came to this church. It was just a natural progression, to stay in the village and come here. Of course, the service was very different to what I was used to, but I felt very comfortable and I was always made to feel very welcome.

*'We'd make it a really festive occasion.'*

SPALDING  
Geoff Beba

Most Chapel Anniversaries were in the summer and we always used to dress up in our finery. The ladies put on their dresses and their fine hats, and it was a really special occasion. They would hold a Chapel Tea, not on the Sunday, but on the Monday or Tuesday after, and then we'd have sports and running, stalls, hoopla and that type of thing. We'd make it a really festive occasion.

SUTTON ST. JAMES  
Janet Spinks

You got a new dress and a new hat, and nobody was allowed to see the dresses before the day. Mrs Boardman would make nearly all of them. Everyone went for a fitting, but they never, ever saw anybody else's dress.

SPALDING  
Geoff Beba

On the Chapel Anniversary day, the children would give recitations and sing. On one occasion I stood up and I just forgot and, of course, I burst into tears. But I said my recitation at another Anniversary, when I was seven. It's called 'Jimmy's Lesson':

*'Jimmy was inclined to boast, he didn't mean to lie,  
but oh, how he loved to tell a tale chock-full of me and I.  
'Sure, I can swim' he said one day, 'I learned last summer, see.  
I guess there isn't one of you could win a race with me.'  
But once, not so long after this, on an excursion day,  
he learned that bragging to his pals just simply didn't pay.  
They rested by a little lake while on their cycle spin,  
and Jimmy larking with the rest unhappily fell in.*

*The others thinking he could swim thought this a jolly joke,  
but James for all his boastful feats just couldn't swim a stroke,  
and probably would have drowned but for a passer-by,  
who dived in fully clothed upon hearing Jimmy's cry.  
Because his friends had been so scared, they didn't rub it in,  
but they exchanged some mocking looks and many a boyish grin.  
But Jimmy, he made a vow that day, what's more he kept it too,  
that he would nevermore make claim to what he couldn't do.'*

MOULTON  
Valerie Venables

I couldn't be an Anglican now. I'm really sorry to say that, but I really am in the Methodist tradition. I don't think I would want to be any other way, although I know both.

The Methodist church was run by ordinary people. You went because 'Uncle Fred's got the service tonight.' But some of the beautiful chapels have gone, like the Wesleyan on the way into Whaplode Drove. That was a beautiful chapel, really beautiful. It had a built-up stage at the back, and it was terrific, but it's gone.

WHAPLODE  
Alwyn Chilvers

There's only two members left: my mother and myself, and she's almost 90. In the last ten years we've gone from eighteen or twenty down to two. It's not lack of funds, it's bodies: there are several round about that have had to close for lack of support. We had one or two people come in from faraway parts, but they didn't settle, so they moved on and we lost them. That's what happens, unfortunately. There's nothing you can do about it.

## MUSIC

*'My family were all players'*

BICKER  
Sandra Dawson

They had a choir: it was a sung service, which was beautiful. Coming from a musical family, I really, really took to that.

BICKER  
Elizabeth Benjamin

I was in the choir from the age of eight, and in the school choir. We didn't have a choirmaster—just the organist. We had choir practice on a Friday evening to go through the hymns for the Sunday. I sometimes wish I'd taken it further and had some singing lessons, or joined another choir after school, but you're doing other things when you're sixteen.

WHAPLODE  
Alison Ward

Music does work so well in the church. The sound is like nothing else, anywhere. I sing in the choir here, and in the Deanery choir for Evensong at Holbeach on Sundays. It brings people from different churches together to practice, and sing the anthem. To join with other people in producing a good sound is a wonderful experience, and very moving.

Roy Strong (2004)

The new polyphonic music, which consisted of an interweaving of many lines and called for many voices [...] gradually spread into parish churches funded by pious parishioners and wealthy guilds.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

If I could have sung I think I would have made a career out of it, but I can't, so playing the church organ is my vocation within the church, if you like.

MOULTON CHAPEL

Peg Fountain

My dad was a choirboy: there were about ten boys and ten men in the choir then, and my uncle was organ blower. I think he started when he was eight years old, in 1908. The organ was in the gallery and the organist—Mr Veal, the headmaster—used to come down the stairs and go to the pub while a sermon was on. My uncle always knew when Mr Veal was coming back because one of the steps made a noise. When my auntie was old enough, she was organist for a long while.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

I was playing in our church when I was knee-high to a grasshopper. It was nerve-wracking, but they hadn't got an organist, so I filled in. I've done it ever since, wherever I've lived. When we moved, I'd hear the bell ringing on a Sunday morning and I kept thinking, 'You should go: you should get involved in the church'. Then my neighbour said, 'They need an organist: go and introduce yourself'. Unfortunately, when I got here the original organ had just been taken out, so I never saw that. It was riddled with woodworm, but I was sad not to get to play on it.



SUTTON ST. JAMES

Tony Fitt-Savage

My family were all players, I had organ lessons at Wisbech Church. I was a piano tuner by trade in King's Lynn, and as they needed an organist at one of the parishes, I played there for several years. I then met the organist of Sandringham and he asked me to deputise for him. When he left, I took over, and spent most of my life there. Some organists play very obscure music that no one knows. Now, at Sutton St. James, I tend to play things that people like and know.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

David Fuller

That was a huge pipe organ, which was played quite expertly by a number of organists, some more enthusiastically than others. It filled the church easily.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Ann Fuller

If I'd had a bad day at work, I would creep in the door, and just have a go on the organ before I went home, and that was so soothing. Not very often, but every now and then.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

We've got a little Hammond organ now, which is very good, with stops typical of the 70s—the Wurlitzer and that Hammond sound. It's good and it does the job. I play here every other Sunday and at Whaplode, but I've played at many of the churches in the Deanery, down as far as Crowland Abbey. That was a real treat: almost playing a cathedral organ, which is my ambition: I'd love to do that.

FISHTOFT

Richard Hart

The previous organist died suddenly 15 years ago and we'd got nobody for Christmas services. I play the piano, but I wasn't an organist. Fortunately we have an instrument suitable for both competent organists and pianists, and I've been doing it ever since.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

I play before and after but also during the service, when people are taking communion. I play traditional and modern pieces, like *Bittersweet Symphony* by The Verve. I did it in keeping with a church environment, but it's got such a lovely flow to it. I play all sorts of things like that—new pieces mixed with the older music. I get a real buzz when people come to me afterwards asking, 'What was that piece you played? It was lovely.'

Charles Kightly (2000)

...that now vanished glory of country churches, 'the playing quire' or 'church band', a group of variously talented amateurs who accompanied psalm or hymn-singing on fiddle, bass, clarinet, bassoon, serpent and other assorted instruments. For comparatively few rural churches possessed organs until the 19<sup>th</sup> century...

FISHTOFT

Kay Hart

On the second Sunday of the month we have a little band to provide the music for our Worship Together services. I play flute, the rector plays guitar and his son plays bass; we have another guitarist and his son plays saxophone. It tends to be a bit more of a lively service. We have a lot of other young people who will join us for big services like Harvest Festival and Mothers Day: three or four clarinets, a couple of flutes and two or three saxophones. I arrange the music for these services. Some people prefer the organ and traditional hymns, but the congregation numbers have gone down and down and down. If you don't do something, there'll be no church. So you try different things—some people don't like it and some like it more. You've just got to keep a balance and try to keep everybody happy, if not at every service.

QUADRING

One of the mums has a lot to do with the church and she asked if the kids would come and play. I said, 'We'll play anywhere, anytime.' The association with the church has been good. They let us practice here and leave all our stuff. The last time we played was the Mother's Day service. It's a lovely atmosphere. We played the things we do best: *Another Brick in the Wall*, *Rule the World*... The kids all enjoyed it. They just did their thing, as they always do.

MOULTON  
Mary Brice

Music is a big part of the church. There's a flourishing choir, albeit all ladies, and in the past, we've had people like the Amadeus String Quartet. People who are not necessarily churchgoers have used the church for very high-class concerts. Then, on the other side of the coin, we had the world champion whistler two years ago. She was absolutely superb. She started with birdsong up by the altar, and everybody looked somewhat astounded. She whistled such high notes that the bats flew out in the middle of proceedings.

GOSBERTON  
Steve Weatherly-Barton

We had a wonderful sell-out concert with a trio from the London Mozart Players. They said our little building was wonderful for acoustics—and keeping warm! It's a traditional 17<sup>th</sup> century meeting house, not a big Victorian tabernacle, so it's very practical. This year we've held a Flower and Crafting Festival, with a choir presenting two short concerts, and exhibits including wood-turning, paintings, photography and tapestry. It could so easily develop into a broader cultural festival—I'd love to do that in the near future.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Alan Sears

Since being churchwarden, we have organised several events in the church to bring the community in. The first was a Gift Day and we had another big one in 2012, and then the concert with the Ukulele Orchestra. It was a fantastic evening. Seventy-five people came and we made £500 for the church.

FISHTOFT  
Kay Hart

The church hosts two or three concerts a year: Boston Choral Society, the Haven Singers and so on. Quintabile were here in May

and we had about 110 people for that: they are a brass quintet from London. Boston Youth Jazz Orchestra always comes to do a concert at the end of November and it's usually sold out. They did something from *Bat Out of Hell* last year and you think 'Is this appropriate?' but it went down a storm.

### *'Using rope sight to see the bells'*

Dorothy L. Sayers (1934)

England, alone in the world, has perfected the art of change-ringing and the true ringing of bells by rope and wheel, and will not lightly surrender her unique heritage.

WRANGLE  
Mike Bainbridge

When you first learn to ring, you've got to learn to handle a bell. That takes, on average, six to eight weeks. From there, you get to be a member of the team, and you're ringing in rounds. When you're proficient at that, you go to 'call changes', which means following another bell and changing but—at the same time—keeping control. Then you go on to plain hunts, which is change ringing.

SUTTON ST. JAMES  
Pauline Stebbings

At that time, there were 14 or 16 of us in the choir, so we all learnt to ring bells. The chappie that's down there now is still tower captain. When I started, his dad was tower captain, his mum used to ring, and they taught the whole choir to ring. They used to take us out on a Saturday night. We'd bike to Holbeach, Whaplode, Moulton—right down to Tydd St Giles.



WRANGLE

Mark Weatherby

People learn when they're younger, then they go to university and it breaks away. It's not until retirement that they decide, 'I wouldn't mind taking it up again'. It's the bit in between where you end up with no bellringers. From Boston down the coast to here, the ringers are mostly older people: out of fifty, there might be only six or seven who are young.

WRANGLE

Mike Bainbridge

With the six bells, there's twelve changes, which means either you remember the bells or you use rope sight, which is learning to see the ropes in their own positions, moving a step at a time. That seems to be the hardest thing for many people. Rope sight means you're counting your place *while* you're ringing: as soon as you change places, you're counting and watching the bells.

WRANGLE

Mike Billington

Old codgers like me started a bit too late and we just can't quite pick it up, because it is very complex. Some people have a natural affinity but others, like me, just get stuck at a certain level: beyond that, it's incredibly hard.

WRANGLE

Mike Bainbridge

Let's say we're changing on a plain course, and you're ringing the treble. You ring it twice and then you go into second's place, which means one bell's going before you and then the other five. Then you go into third's place so there's two bells pulling in front of you: a leader and a second one and you pull in third's place. Then you go into fourth's place, so there's three bells in front of you: a leader, second, third, and you pull in fourth's place. Then you go into fifth's place and it goes on like that until you come to the sixth and then you ring twice in sixth's place and go down to the lead again: fifth's, fourth's, third's, second's. If you can actually count the ropes as you're ringing by using rope sight, you've virtually cracked bell ringing.

WRANGLE

Tony McDonnell

The little detail he's not mentioned about the simple plain hunt is that all the odd numbers are going in one direction and all the evens are going in the other. You're not all travelling the same way: you're criss-crossing each other. To add to that, if you're going to the back, you're ringing slowly in between but, if you're coming forward, you've got to ring quickly to keep in the sequence, because of the different weights of the bells.



WRANGLE  
Mike Billington

The way it was explained to me, when I was taught in Kent, is this. You have a queue of people standing in a line, and you number them all: one, two, three, four, five, six. Imagine you do some queue jumping: you can only jump one place. The fourth person in the queue jumps in front: so now it's one, two, four, three, five and six. You can work out for yourself how the sequence will change, if he moves again and again.

WRANGLE  
Mike Bainbridge

When you've learned methods, you go on to doing quarter peels and full peels. A quarter peel takes roughly 40 minutes and a full peel takes about three hours.

MOULTON  
Mary Brice

There are fewer bellringers nowadays. There's some problem in getting newcomers to learn the craft, but bellringers do tend to last for years and years, don't they?

WRANGLE  
Mike Billington

People see it on television and think you just grab the rope and yank it up and down: so, of course, who would want to do that? But I honestly think that if they knew what was actually involved, we'd be overrun with people.

WRANGLE  
Tony McDonnell

I'm new to the area and I'd never rung a bell before I came here. I saw the notice saying when, and that people are welcome. I turned up at the door, was made welcome and I've been here ever since.



WRANGLE  
Mike Billington

The oldest I've rung was at Christchurch Priory, a 27 hundred-weight bell that was cast in 1370. If you think of a bell as a piece of machinery, which it is to some extent, how many pieces of machinery have been operating continuously since 1370?

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
John Mawby

At one service, a long while ago now, people were walking into the church and the bell fell to the ground, straight in front of one chap. Robert Frost kindly mended it and put it back up and we can ring the bell today, which is very nice to hear on a Sunday morning.

BICKER  
Elizabeth Benjamin

I can hear the bells if the wind is in the right direction; it's nice to hear them.

## ART

*'A beautiful thing to behold'*

Rupert Brooke (1912)

Stands the Church clock at ten to three?  
And is there honey still for tea?

GOSBERTON  
Michael Strutt

I ring the bells at Gosberton and other churches but, as a clock repairer, I also see some really marvellous tower mechanisms. The clock at Bicker has a very unusual escapement—that's the last wheel on the gear train, from which you hear the tick-tock of a clock working. It has a grasshopper escapement that creeps its way around the wheel and really is a beautiful thing to behold. Each village would have had somebody to maintain the clock, going up the tower once a week or more to adjust the pendulum for time keeping and wind the clock. The one in Sutterton has a three-foot handle, and it takes a huge amount of effort. I think it's about a hundred turns to wind the weights up, so there's a fair amount of physical work in it. Everybody would have known who was responsible for the church clock. They'd known the local clockmakers as well. There were several in Spalding and Boston, and some of the villages, too: Kirton had two clockmakers and I believe Gosberton had one. You can see the old mechanical clock in a glass case in Gosberton church. The clock in the tower is now a synchronous



Jane Austen (1814)

I am glad the church is not so close to the great house as often happens in old places. The annoyance of the bells must be terrible.

WRANGLE  
Mike Billington

There are people that object to them. I don't understand why, to be honest, unless it's done a bit badly; for the most part, it's a lovely sound

WRANGLE  
Mike Bainbridge

I've been ringing for well over 30 years now and I love it. It's an age-old tradition that needs to be carried on.

motor and doesn't require much maintenance, but for anybody who's mechanically minded, that mechanism is a thing of beauty.

WHAPLODE  
David Green

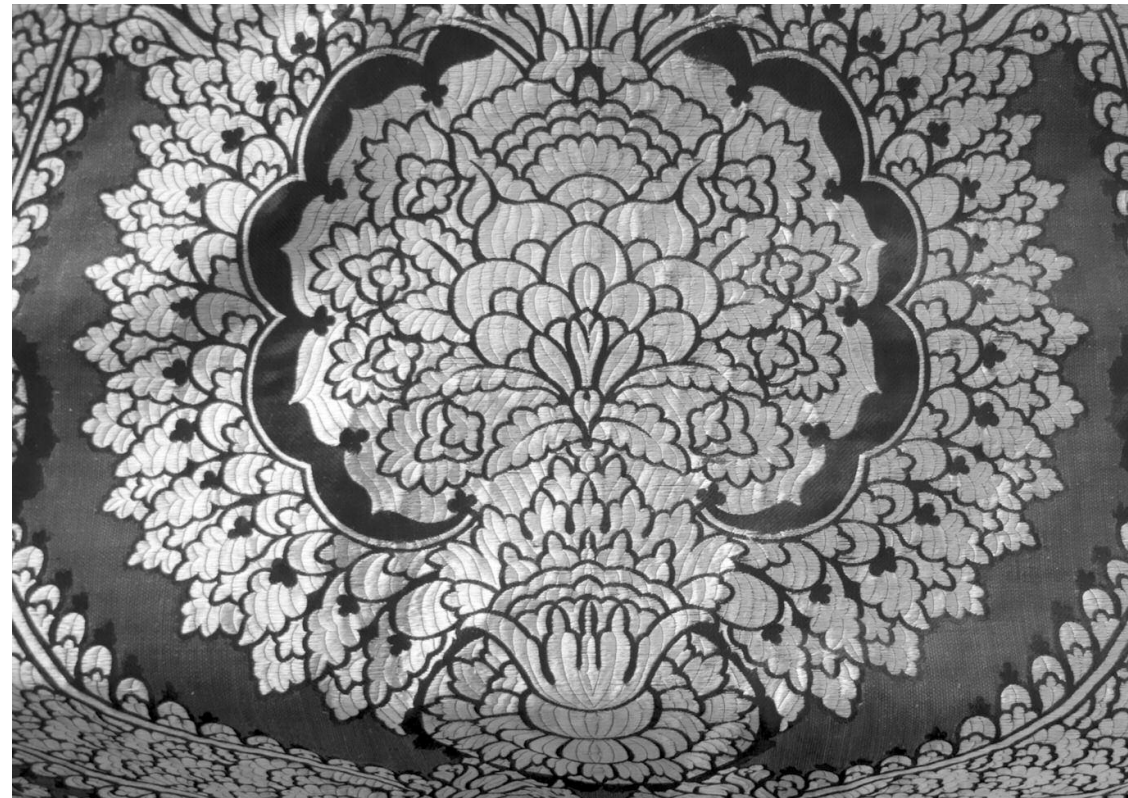
We renovated the church clock in 1969. It was there but dormant, so we took it to pieces, cleaned and put it back in working order. After that I wound it up twice a week most weeks for 43 years. It is 250 years old, I am told. It takes two seconds per tick. In 2012, Roy converted it to electric, so now I am 'Flag Man' instead.

Dorothy M. Owen (1971)

Many churches benefited by bequests, especially of plate, and also sometimes of books, bells, and even altar cloths. Richard Welby esquire of Moulton in 1487 arranged in his will for an altar cloth and frontal of damask to be given to his parish church.

HOLBEACH ST, JOHN  
Joan Chamberlain

Mavis, Anne and myself found some old altar frontals, which I restored. The gold thread was there, but it had all come away. It was a bit difficult because you have to take the back off, but then you fetch your needle up and you just catch the gold thread back—very delicate, it is. I copied the design off the old one: it might have been here since the church was built in Victorian times, because it's very old. I am a dressmaker, but it's completely different from sewing, so now I go to the Spalding Embroiderers' Guild, to learn how to do it properly. I'm learning all the time.



*'It just transforms the church'*

WRANGLE  
Linda Stones

I've always loved flowers. I'm not one of these that can do them quickly, but I do enjoy it. September is my month for arranging the flowers at the altar. I enjoy being alone with my thoughts, flowers and the peace of the church. I have plenty of greenery in my garden and usually some flowers, depending on the weather. Chrysanthemums are long lasting, provided they are well watered.

BICKER  
Retired Churchwarden

We have a flower rota and we do it a fortnight at a time. I usually put pots at the back just from the garden — on the font and one in the window, just as you open the door. It's like a welcome, isn't it?

WRANGLE  
Linda Stones

We have a good team of ladies, all with their own styles, and they all do their very best. You do know something good's going to come up when such a person does it... We're very, very fortunate that we've got people who put their hands to anything, inside and outside, to keep the church in good order and well cared for.

MOULTON  
Flower arranger

We have two or three lunches in the year to raise money towards the altar flowers, and then most of us do the arrangements out of our own pocket. For the Festival, there's a group who meet to discuss the theme, and then we start on the Wednesday prior to it opening on the Saturday. It just transforms the church.



SUTTON ST. JAMES

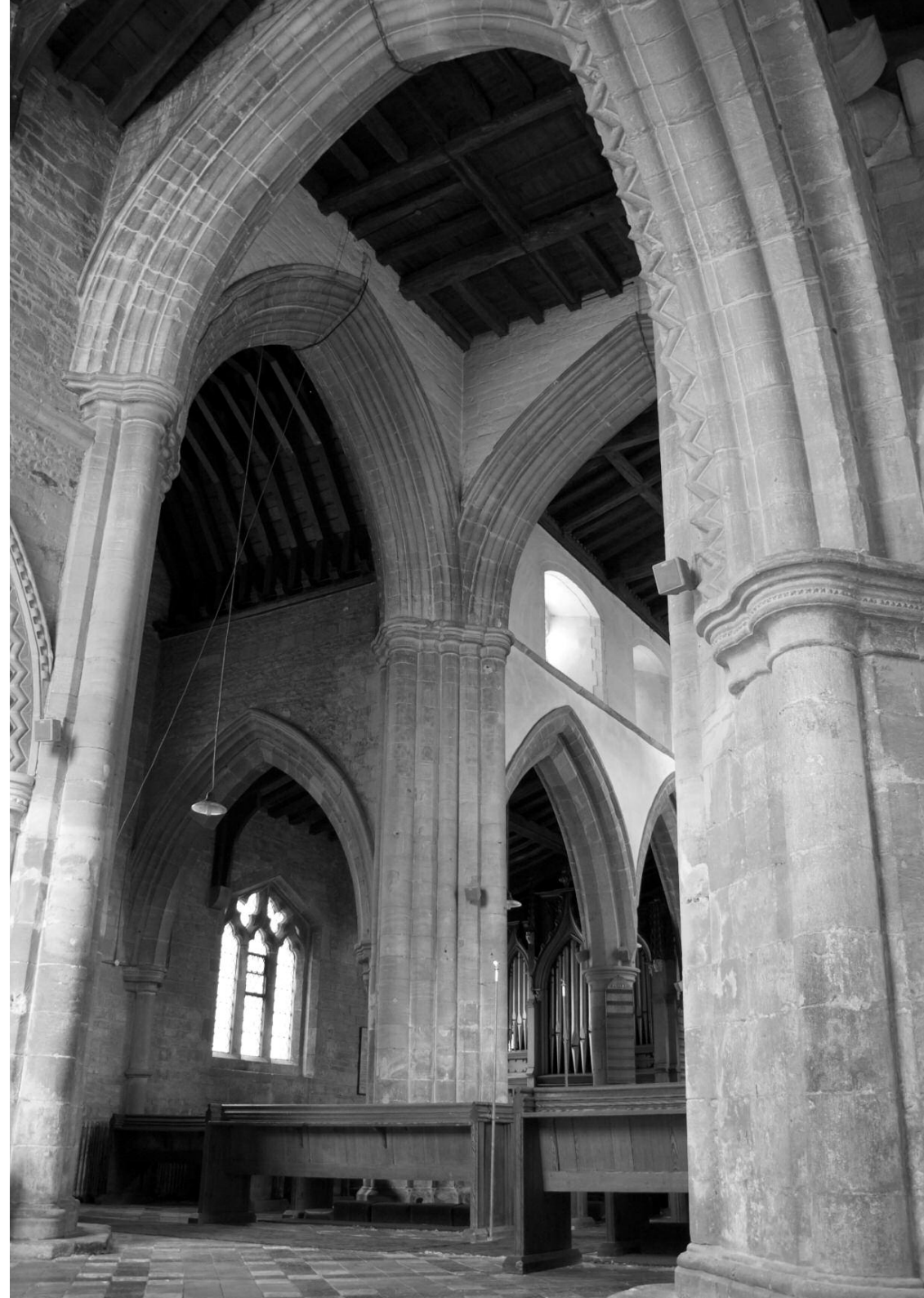
Annette Dean

We don't have a theme—people can do as they will. We've got some very fine flower arrangers who do the Festival. One was a Chelsea Gold, and another is a professional.

WHAPLODE

Alwyn Chilvers

When the Flower Festivals are on, you get masses of people on bus trips, going round all the churches. You should see the cars and the people that come here on August Bank Holiday weekend. People have a wander around the church and a cup of tea. They will come at times like that, if not to a Sunday service.





## UPKEEP

*'You have to keep it shipshape'*

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Lucille Sears

We usually come and clean the church, or we come up and say a prayer. It's such a lovely building. It's old, and you have to keep it shipshape.

CROWLAND

An Abbey Guide

There's an unsung band of heroes who come in to the Abbey, cleaning, doing flowers, keeping the outside tidy. You'll have someone come in and say, 'It's been raining. I'm just going to check to see if it's come through again', and someone else will say, 'I've got to go up and see to the clock.' Someone else comes to get the bells ready for ringing; someone comes and touches up a sign. They're all different and they all come in unsung, unpaid—it's quite extraordinary. You'd never ever realise it, until you sit here for the afternoon. And there's no fanfare: they come in, they do it and off they go again. It's as if it's part of the fabric of the village and they are doing their bit almost automatically. I think a lot is handed down through the generations. You get people whose parents and grandparents have done work and they just carry on the tradition.



WRANGLE  
Geoff Barnett

Churchwardens have a responsibility to do all we can to sustain the activities of the church. We're re-elected once a year by the PCC, then we give allegiance by standing up, within the congregation, and taking the vows. Last year, it was at Lincoln Cathedral—it was a massive thing. This year it was at Kirton, just for the Deanery. I like to do my duties, and very much enjoy working with all the very good volunteers we have in the community.

COWBIT  
Mary Haresign

To get anything done in a church is a huge rigmarole. At the moment, the clock has stopped and needs repair. You would think that would be quite a simple thing but it isn't because of the forms and things you have to fill in and send off to the Diocese. So just getting the clock repaired will take a lot of time and energy.

COWBIT  
Charles Brown

The faculty system that governs the repairs or introduction of changes in these ancient churches is rather cumbersome, but it is there to ensure that proper work is done and that if something new is introduced, it's in keeping. It's one reason these places *are* wonderful.

WRANGLE  
Geoff Barnett

As churchwarden you're responsible for maintenance of the building and the churchyard. I do as much as I can myself, but I've been beaten by that south aisle roof, after many years. We got some professional people in and they're about beaten with it as well, so we'll have to think about having it renewed.

BICKER  
Retired Churchwarden

We have applied twice for a grant but didn't get it so, at the moment, we're not applying. We've just got to get a bit more in the kitty to attract a grant.

BOSTON  
Luke Skerritt

It's a real challenge to look after a church with falling attendances. Each building is a unique structure, and may have quite incredible artworks in it—sculptural and in wall paintings.

SWINESHEAD  
Jane Robertson

This church is huge, and the people bear the weight of fundraising to maintain the fabric. They're having to look for something like half a million pounds now, and the weight of that is terrific. The weight of this building is smothering the joy that their faith should bring them.



GOSBERTON  
Tony Quinton

Buildings can be ties, distracting us from what God is asking us to do in going out and ministering to people. They're special places and it's hard for an ever-decreasing number of people to keep, without losing focus on the needs of society and its spiritual needs.

FISHTOFT  
Richard Hart

Our focus really is on community involvement. This church building just happens to be where we meet. Looking after it is a burden in some ways and, if we were choosing a place to meet now, it wouldn't be like this. But we've got what we've got, and we enjoy it. It's part of the village's heritage, but the important bit is how we get our Christian message to, and engage with, the community.

## *'We have all sorts of fundraising occasions'*

COWBIT  
Mary Haresign

There's a very mistaken idea about how the church is funded. People think that the Church Commissioners are rich and pay our bills. Actually, the money doesn't come in—it goes out from here to the Diocese. That's a hard message to get across.

FISHTOFT  
Marc Cooper

There's often an assumption that churches are funded by government, or by the diocese, and so we do have to remind people that we aren't! A sense of ownership should also mean a sense of responsibility. A sense of collective ownership. We all need to look after our inherited parish church, to be able to hand it on.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Mavis Orrey

There was talk of the church closing at one time, so my husband and I came to a meeting and joined the restoration committee. It's 25 years ago now, but we raised £17,000 in five years.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
John Mawby

We're very lucky that the money comes in very well. People look after us, and the church is kept in as good repair as we can afford.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Alan Sears

Our main fundraising events are the parish lunches, six times a year, September to March, in the village hall. It's a strict roast beef meal, and the ladies produce very succulent desserts. We've had as many as 60 or 75 people coming along to support us.



Nicholas Antram (1989)

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS. 1839-1840 by Robert Ellis of Fleet. Gothic.  
Brick. Nave and short chancel. Tallish lancets. W. front with highly  
incorrect shallow porch and a bellcote. Plain whitewashed interior.

WRANGLE

George Danby

Every year, the Friends of Wrangle Church have a function just before Christmas—mulled wine, mince pies, some singing and a bit of poetry. A few years ago they said, ‘Would I recite something in Lincolnshire dialect?’ I looked in two or three poetry books and I didn’t find anything suitable, so I decided to write my own. I did one each year for the church, and then I’ve written several in between. When I was a young lad, it was frowned upon to speak broad Lincolnshire, which I think is bad. It wants keeping going.

BICKER

Sandra Dawson

We hold the Steam Threshing and the money we’ve raised over 28 years has repaired the chancel roof. Now we’re starting again, to raise money to get the rest done.

WHAPLODE

Cyril Hearn

There are quite a few people in the area who recognise this as their church. There are some very generous local people who will support the church, but have nothing to do with the clergy. It’s unfortunate, but that’s the way they are.



MOULTON CHAPEL

Jean Cottam

We have all sorts of fundraising occasions and villagers will come to those, but coming on a Sunday to church doesn’t appeal to them somehow.

MOULTON

Mary Brice

It can’t be all about money, though—there’s something more important. So many lonely people trot along to church, and then they go home and they’re alone for the rest of the day, and it’s a shame. A friendly face, sometimes, is what matters.

*'It's open every day now'*

W. F. Rawnsley (1914)

Bicker church has been well restored by the Rev. H.T. Fletcher, now ninety-three years of age, who has been rector for half a century. It is kept locked on account of recent thefts in the neighbourhood.

BICKER

Elizabeth Benjamin

We can't leave the church unlocked like we used to. Everything would be out and there was no problem, but we had people try to steal the lead off the roof 18 months ago. Today, you see all the nice brass and silver out, but it will all get locked away after the weekend. You just cannot risk it, can you?

BICKER

Retired Churchwarden

It's terrible to have to think that really, but it does happen. The last vicar to live in the rectory had an auction of all his big furniture, so we thought we'd leave the church open for people to look round. We had six of those brass pedestal candlesticks and when we came to lock up, four had gone. But we're getting used to having the glass vases. I think they're fine. It is amazing what importance one puts on these silver items. It's not important any more, really.

SWINESHEAD

I like being able to walk around the old churches, but a lot are now locked, so you can't get in during the day. You can't go in and have—for want of a better way of putting it—any private time, to sit and think on your own.



GOSBERTON

Tony Quinton

It's a place for the community to be when they want peace, quiet, talking—whatever. It used to be a place where everybody went in. Sometimes, we're a bit scared that somebody's going to deface the church or nick something. So what? It's only things. We're concerned about people, their lives and what they can give to each other.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Sally Ann Clifton

I think it's a tribute to the people of the village and how much they love this church, but we've frequently left it open overnight and nothing has ever gone missing or been damaged. I have come down in the middle of the night on a couple of occasions because I suddenly thought 'Have I locked the church?' and you can be here at two o'clock in the morning and not feel any unease. You just walk in and you feel at home.

BICKER

Sandra Dawson

It's open every day now, which is a very new thing, and there is obviously a need for that, with the amount of people going in, just for a few minutes. And that's good - they may not come on Sunday, but they do need the church and they are making use of it. Times have changed with churches. Sunday's a family day now, so people don't tend to attend church because they go out with the family. Maybe the Church has got to move more to midweek. I'm treasurer, so I'm there quite a lot, and I didn't really know how we would get on with the church being open during the day, but now I realise it *is* needed, people do use it. People come in, have a quiet time. We were in there on Monday afternoon, cleaning, and three different people came in just to look round; one from away and

two out of the village, just to walk around; they probably would've sat down to have some quiet time but we were cleaning. And they're very welcome. We're very pleased that we've done it. And in these times of war and everything else people do need somewhere to go.

### *'People care what happens here'*

BOSTON

Ernie Napier

The people of Boston are proud of the building and regard it as *their* church. It belongs to the town, whether or not they worship here. Every day, many people come into the church to light a candle and pray for loved ones or just sit quietly in contemplation. Local people, too, are always very, very good at answering appeals. This was very apparent in the weeks after the floods in December 2013 when I'm sure the staff lost count of the number of offers of help they received.

WRANGLE

Geoff Barnett

We get a lot of support, I think, without people realising probably how much they do. It's a good community, right from the top of business to the widow's mite, right the way through. We're a well-supported church.

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

Quite a lot of people do view it as their church, which is good—especially those who've been here a long time or have family connections—even though they have relatively little contact with it.



There are people who will support it financially even though they never actually attend services, because they see it as their local church. Those numbers have dropped in the last 30 years, but a lot of people view the church like that, and it is their church.

BICKER  
Sandra Dawson

The older ones have died, or moved into homes away from the village, and the younger people don't come, or only when it's a special occasion. But people in the village, the majority of us, still care for the church. There will be quite a lot who come and give today. There would be an uproar if the church were to close.

GOSBERTON  
Ian Walters

When we've discussed changes we might make, we've often had letters from people we rarely ever see in the church, expressing



strong opinions about not interfering with the fabric; so I know people care what happens here.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Alan Sears

We're not many members in the church, but we hold our own. I would like to think we're well-supported by the village. The church is solid. We support it and just hope it keeps going. It was consecrated in 1840, so it's amazing that it goes on for such a length of time. The building is the community; it keeps us together.

## FAITH

Nicholas Antram (1989)

SUTTON ST. JAMES. The nave disappeared during the Commonwealth. The tower and the chancel remain, the latter much re-done in 1879 by W. Bassett Smith and again in 1894, when the west wall was rebuilt following subsidence. The style is Perp, tall, with tall three-light windows.

### *‘Like Abraham journeying into the unknown’*

SWINESHEAD

Years ago there were three people in the village you went to talk to: the publican, the vicar and the doctor. I should think if there are 50 people who use the pub regularly, that's all. If there are 20 people who use the church regularly, that's all. The doctor is the only one that is inundated with people now.

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

The church is taken for granted in the sense that people assume it'll always be there and involved in local life, which is why if you ever close a village church, it's a massive shock.

MOULTON

Valerie Venables

We're a very thin congregation now. We no longer have a Sunday school, sadly, since our children have grown up. Sometimes there

are grandchildren, so we do have children in the church, but not a Sunday school. Various people do the jobs but, really, I think we will eventually close. It's so sad that we can't get more people involved.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Annette Dean

Of course, young people don't want to go to church: they've got so many other things they think they should be doing. You just keep trying, and we find the social way is bringing people in so they can see what we do, who we are—because some think that people who go to church regularly are a bit unusual. They can come and see that we are human and we do enjoy doing social things. We found that very, very helpful.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Joyce Salmon

I know we are a church, but people will come to something that will make them smile, or a Christmas carol service—they'll come to that and sing their hearts out. By having these sort of things, hopefully we'll encourage a few more to come in.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Annette Dean

My husband said, 'When God puts the glue in the lock, it will close'. But he hasn't done that yet, so we're still going on. We're a small congregation, but quite lively. We work together, we work as a team.

HOLBEACH ST JOHN'S

Ann Fuller

It's a place where we go to christenings, weddings and funerals. We ought to come at other times. We always say we will, but then we don't. I don't know why.

SWINESHEAD

When my mother was alive I always used to go to communion, because she went every Sunday. Since then it's been births, deaths and marriages.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Joan Joyce

We're not actually churchgoers, ourselves. We always seem to be working or on different shifts, but I was invited to help with the flowers, and we come to special occasions. I love the Christmas carol service. It is a big part of village life and, of course, you're meeting the community and you've got that togetherness feeling.

COWBIT

Charles Brown

Most of the parents are nominally Christian, because we have a fair number that want their children baptised, but then we never see them in church. I think the presence of the church is taken for granted. People think, 'Well, it's here; always has been, always will be. It's really good that whoever comes on Sunday is praying for us, but it's not something that we need to bother about ourselves.' This is the problem for me as a minister. Rather like Abraham journeying into the unknown, we're on this journey; and, yes, it often seems as if we're going through the desert. But I do think we see an oasis in the distance.

GOSBERTON

Steve Weatherly-Barton

The church has got to see its place in developing people's imagination. Life has become very prosaic, and then people start thinking in rather narrow ways. C. S. Lewis's books have struck a chord because they put theology and life in an imaginative context. People can think without feeling that it's religious. Our older folk don't

naturally think in terms of using the arts, but I think we're gently showing them that it can be done.

SWINESHEAD

Charles Robertson

I've always been interested in what villages are saying to the world, because they're trying to articulate a story that has been going on forever. I think if I'm going to find God anywhere, I'd better go to a village. So I serve God here, hoping that he will knock on the door. I can walk with him there.

GOSBERTON

Ian Walters

One reason why people treat the church with caution may be that it represents something very pure, a challenge to how the world is. Many are troubled by the way they feel the world is progressing, and perhaps it speaks of a different age when people lived in a different way. Maybe the church speaks to people in a good way that gives them a sense of the greater picture, and gives them hope. People do take it for granted in one sense, but in another they treat it with such respect that they want to come here for special occasions.

*'They'll come to big things'*

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

Often people will come to the big services: Remembrance, Christmas, some to Harvest and Mothering Sunday. Fewer to Easter than you used to get, and Midnight Communion isn't nearly as big as it used to be, though quite a lot of people still come.

COWBIT

Charles Brown

Christmas is probably our best-attended service, both in Cowbit and in Crowland, which is a much bigger place. The Christmas Eve crib service is acted out by the children, but it only lasts about half an hour. We get our best attendance for that; in Crowland, it's standing room only.

MOULTON CHAPEL

Peg Fountain

Harvest Festival used to be a big occasion. The windowsills and the altar used to be full of produce and then it all went to the hospital. Now we don't bring anything, and if we do we take it home with us.

BICKER

Sandra Dawson

The Harvest Festival is always lovely. The children from school have a service and they bring boxes: it looks beautiful and you get quite a few people. On Remembrance Sunday we start at church and go to the memorial. Quite a few will go from church, about fifty, but they won't all come back there. It is growing again, because of all the troubles: people probably know somebody that has been in one of the wars, or are out there now.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

I play the flute at the War Memorial on Remembrance Sunday: 'The Last Post' and 'Reveille'.

PINCHBECK

Elizabeth Sneath

There's a list of all the men who went to war in the First World War. My grandfather's name is on there, and he came back. I just



think it's amazing that we've still got people living in the village, like me and others, who are connected with those men. We're going to create a wall hanging, which will be a link from the First World War to now, to hang in the church, near that memorial, to show what the village is like now, and tie in with the Great War commemorations. We might put the names of all the men from the First World War around it; embroider them on in some way. We are the living link with those men. Imagine how we would feel if we had a quilt from the Great War, which had been made by those people.

Henry Thorold and Jack Yates (1965)

PINCHBECK, The church of grand Perp, detail and on a sumptuous scale was restored by Butterfield (1856-64). [...] Carvings round the west door, a handsome porch, and a splendid nave roof.

### *'The church holds all that coming and going'*

GOSBERTON

Ian Walters

In the crises of life, people value it very much. When we have a funeral of someone who has lived in the community for a while, the church can be very full, and people appreciate it for that: it does signify something very deep in their being at those times.

BICKER

Retired Churchwarden

We have only had one wedding this year. We used to have a lot, but they're so expensive, so elaborate. Things change: they used to be simple occasions. Of course, if the church does not really mean anything to them, there's no point in putting all that money out.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Tim Galley

I find weddings dreadfully nerve-wracking. I can practice and be perfect at home then I come to the wedding and my fingers go. But I love playing at funerals: the opportunity to comfort people with music like Tomaso Albinoni's *Adagio for Strings in G Minor*—just to play that with feeling. It helps. It lifts that very sad moment.

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

Since I've been here, I've done funerals for between 40 and 50 members of my congregation: that's quite a lot, so thankfully we've had some new people in that time. The falling congregation numbers are an issue for most churches, but being here for a good length of time means you make good friends with a lot of people in the church. You've known them a long time and been through a lot together when you've been here a long time and so they're able to support you as well.

WRANGLE

George Danby

They used to ring the dead bell when people died, years ago. You could tell from how it was rung whether it was a man or a woman, or young or old.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Sally Ann Clifton

We've had some very busy years for funerals, sadly, but they've been balanced by the number of christenings, which is always something amazing.



GOSBERTON

Tony Quinton

I was actually baptised in this church, when I was about 32. My friend Simon was baptised at the same time, and my daughter, when she was born. So there were three of us: a little girl and a couple of biggies.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Pauline Stebbings

We fill the place for christenings now: we probably get 80 people in for a christening if they have it on a Sunday afternoon: that's quite an event.

SWINESHEAD

Jane Robertson

The church holds all that coming and all that going. We go off into our lives, but there is something held here of what we were, and did, and brought. You think of people coming in during the First World War to pray for their sons. They might not be churchgoers, but they come here to say something, perhaps not even knowing to whom. This place holds all that, all the hopes and fears.

*'Not too high and not too low'*

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Sally Ann Clifton

Sometimes you come in and you just know it's going to be a peaceful, quiet service—certainly for the morning prayers. So, when you look at the readings and you know who's going to be here, you think, 'Well, I know what the hymns *should* be but I think we'll go for something a bit more peaceful', because that's going to suit the mood.

FISHTOFT

Angela Gilbert, Lay Reader

I do like the liturgy in the Church of England. I was brought up on the old 1662 Prayer Book. I really liked it and it's nice to have the occasional 1662 service but, I'm sorry, it isn't really relevant to younger, newer people today.

BICKER

Retired Churchwarden

I like Evensong, which Charlie takes. I suppose we get ten or twelve. We don't have an organist or anything like that, but we do the best we can.

MOULTON CHAPEL

Angela Fisher

We only get two services a month—one communion and one Evensong. We are all very regular attenders; not many of us, but we're always here.

MOULTON

Mary Brice

There's a great feeling with some that church should be traditional, not trying to be up-to-date and modern.



GOSBERTON

Steve Weatherly-Barton

We need to develop as a place that breaks away from traditional church—shortly we shall be starting a monthly coffee table church, where people can come and go, where they can ask questions, where there's no pressure to conform to old ways of doing things.

MOULTON

Last year we had the Irish band. They came for the Tulip Festival, and then came to Moulton to give the Songs of Praise. We gave them a meal and they marched from the community centre down to church: It was full and it was just lovely. The minute they struck up, you tingled. I'd come to church every week if it was like that.

FISHTOFT

Richard Hart

Where there's a choice, people go where they feel comfortable. The Church of England offers a variety of worship styles and within a couple of miles of St Guthlac's one can find high church, evangelical and traditional styles. We consider ourselves very middle of the road.

FISHTOFT

Angela Gilbert, Lay Reader

We're not too high and not too low. We still have the liturgy, but in a modern easy-going way. Marc designs a lot of our services—we have a Celtic service he designed—and, for my lay reader course, I designed one for Candlemas. I tend to just do the evening services now. I'm here to serve the people, to give them the services they want, in the way they want to do them.



COWBIT  
Mary Haresign

We had one priest, who's now at Burgh-le-Marsh, who had a dog and the dog always went where Father Terry went, so the dog came to church, and lay by the altar. At our children's services, everybody had a little job—somebody might be ringing the bells, somebody might be giving out books, but the star job was to look after the dog.

MOULTON  
Mary Brice

One of the highlights was the pet blessing. People trotted along with a dog or a hamster, a tarantula, a gerbil, or whatever. I read something from Albert Schweitzer and then all the animals were brought up—and it was as if they knew how to behave in church. I don't think we had a single bark or a growl, and the vicar knelt down and she talked to them all. Then they got their certificate and the local pet shop gave them doggy bags and off they went very happily. I felt the church came alive; the powers that be and all those people who are buried therein would be very happy.

*'As we say, you meet a friend here'*

HOLBEACH ST. JOHN  
Mavis Orrey

As we say, you meet a friend here and you have a nice quiet hour to yourself; your own prayers and your own thoughts. It does mean a lot to me now.

CROWLAND  
An Abbey Guide

I always say, ‘Hello, God, I’m back again’, every time I come in. It’s a working church so, as a guide, you do have to know when to hold back, because people come in for prayer. Then perhaps I’ll go and make a cup of tea or clear off for a while, just to leave them on their own.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS  
Tim Galley

I’ve always looked to my faith to help me, because it says so many times in the Bible, ‘Do not be afraid. I am with you always’. I’m 50 this year and it’s taken me all this time to accept that God’s word is true, and he is there for us. He does carry us through.

SWINESHEAD  
Charles Robertson

Christ didn’t come to set up an organised religion. I always see myself as a priest of God. The Church of England is an instrument of his ministry and should always be second to the truth that God is in his community, serving and being with his people. The Church is there as a vehicle, to declare the presence of God. Really, the best church would be a glass church—invisible to the naked eye, yet containing the truth of God’s presence in the community.

MOULTON CHAPEL  
Jean Cottam

It’s not all about a building, is it? Although we love it, it’s about the faith you hold; that inner peace you get. I don’t know what you can say, other than that it is all about our faith.





## COMMUNITY

### *'More than a place of worship'*

MOULTON CHAPEL

Anne Brown

I was born in Moulton Chapel. My parents were married at the church; I was christened at the church; confirmed at the church and married at the church. And I want my funeral here. Eight years ago I moved into Spalding, but I still come back here. I just had to come back to my own church, my own village. It's like coming home.

FISHTOFT

Marc Cooper

We've got a chalice that was paid for by one of the parishioners. Now he's since died, but he was churchwarden, his father was churchwarden, his grandfather was churchwarden: their names are in the lead on the roof.

SUTTON ST. JAMES

Annette Dean

That's the thing—it's like walking into an extension of your home. You feel comfortable, you feel loved, wanted and very welcomed. The church door must always be open when we're in the church, because a closed door is not welcoming.

Samuel H. Miller (1890)

SWINESHEAD, St. Mary, is a fine spacious stone edifice in Dec. and Perp. styles. The nave has six bays and is clerestoried. The chancel was rebuilt in 1847. The tower is 160ft. high, surmounted by a low spire. There are in the interior some 16<sup>th</sup> century monuments that are interesting, also a recent memorial east window. The register dates from 1639.

SWINESHEAD

Jane Robertson

For a lot of women, in particular, the church is more than a place of worship: it's a link with the past. They'll say *'I was baptised here; I'm 92 now'*; *'My Mum and Dad were married there'*; or *'Uncle Fred bought that'*. When you go round the church, people show you things: *'Oh look, my mum did this. She's dead now'*. I was talking to a lady at another church the other day. She was doing the flowers in the spot where her mother used to do them. She rarely comes to church, but that is really, really important. So these places help people hold on to their own family stories, and they matter enormously because of it. They're important beyond being where the Christian community lives and works.

PINCHBECK

Elizabeth Sneath

My parents have both been regular churchgoers, all their lives. My father was churchwarden for over 20 years. Pinchbeck church is central to my life: I was baptised there, I married my husband there, buried my husband there. Yes, it's a very central, integral part of my life.

*'It's important to be a place where things happen'*

GOSBERTON

Ian Walters

I am convinced that the church can speak in all sorts of ways to the young and to their parents, because, after all, the whole building is a work of art. It's a very healthy dimension for children to encounter as they grow up, with all the other challenges that they will face. To be able express a little of their feelings through art is very important. It connects the children with the church: they may return, see their work here, and feel a part of it. It will help them feel rooted in their community, which is so important because people do not have roots so much today.

GOSBERTON

Steve Weatherly-Barton

It's important for our church building to be a place where things happen. We've made a little start and hosted the playgroup when they had nowhere to meet. We are also hosting training meetings for our local First Responders. The building really does lend itself to things like that.

COWBIT

Charles Brown

Our bishop has asked every parish to think very carefully about their mission for the community, about reaching out to more people in a new way. We met last month and concluded unanimously that our partner in mission here is our church school. A very hopeful idea came from the fact that the school doesn't have enough room for its breakfast club. We are thinking we could use the church as a venue for the breakfast club. For this to happen we would need running water and a toilet in the church, but we are thinking we might seek grants for these facilities. I think the village

would value this practical response on our part because, sadly, people may not understand about the importance of prayer, whereas they do see the importance of a breakfast club. It's probably a case of actions speaking louder than words.

SWINESHEAD

Charles Robertson

We want to take the church back to its original conception as the home of the community, with spirituality as part of a normal expression of working life, and the church as a place of artistry, of education and of healing. Once, the people here *were* the church in the community. There wasn't any visible difference between them and anyone else then and there isn't today.

GOSBERTON

Tony Quinton

The community has changed over the years. We had lots of young families in Sunday School, but they grew up and have gone away. Now, you see the cycle changing. We've got new ways of doing Sunday school, like 'Messy Church'. We've got new families moving in and a new generation coming through, learning about Jesus Christ, the ministry, the church, and the world around them.

COWBIT

Charles Brown

People come with their gifts and talents and that can make a big difference. One person may have a heart for working with elderly people and another for working with children. We're very blessed in the gifts we have in our small congregation, especially with regard to children's work.



HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

John Mawby

The church functions all help: whether it be lunches in the village hall or events at the church, it's always well supported. Without that, the only other place is the pub. We do miss the school and the village shop: those went and the village wasn't the same. If it wasn't for the church, the village would fall to pieces.

Henry Thorold (1989)

BICKER: Trees and rows of cottages line the dyke, and lead to the imposing cruciform church, described by Sir Nikolaus Pevsner as 'truly amazing'. It boasts a truncated but impressive Norman nave, central tower, long chancel, and much else...

*'It's the strength of the friendship here'*

COWBIT

Mary Haresign

We shouldn't get too hung up on how large or small our congregation but remember that our job as disciples is to take—it sounds a bit pious, this—to take God's love to the people around us. I think that's what we're here to do, and pray for them.

SWINESHEAD

Jane Robertson

Here, the highlight of the service is when we shake hands and say, 'Peace be with you', in the tradition of the Christian church. It can take forever, because everybody goes to everybody. They hug, they'll shake hands or they'll just touch or whatever. They care for each other. They might be a small congregation, but it's not just a handshake. It is a genuine wanting to speak, and I love that. I find it something really amazing.

HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS,

Lucille Sears

The church means a lot to me because I come to worship God and to be with all the members. We enjoy a good service on a Sunday, and we all get together with love and affection, hugging and kissing and cuddling, and knowing that we're there for each other.

GOSBERTON

Tony Quinton

It's the strength of the friendship here, the strength of the parish, the building and all those associated things, which give you a firm rock foundation. With that, you can do anything. It's sometimes hard to put things into words, but that gives you that solid foundation to say, 'Okay, just shake it off, get up and keep going'.

*'We make sure it continues'*

SWINESHEAD

Charles Robertson

Do we just want more and more and more, just more abundance—at the cost of what makes us who we are? Is there any story that we're following? Are we following God's plan or do we expect another Jesus Christ to come and fix our broken machine, again?

BOSTON

Ernie Napier

We have a parish church with a building that is larger than many cathedrals but doesn't have the financial support they receive because they have that status. Though finance is, and will probably always be, a challenge, it must never be forgotten that this is a place of worship and part of the wider community, not just regarded as a museum.

WHAPLODE

Cyril Hearn

The one thing that we were absolutely determined wouldn't happen was for the church to become a museum. That does happen in some parts, unfortunately, but this is a place of worship—first and foremost.

COWBIT

Charles Brown

I tell our little congregation here that we must always keep in mind that God is with us and that God is not going to allow the Christian faith to die.

BICKER

Elizabeth Benjamin

It's a really lovely church and I hope it can stay open.



HOLBEACH ST. JOHNS

Barry Joyce

People contribute towards the upkeep of the church. and as long as that carries on, the church will be here.

CROWLAND

An Abbey Guide

We make sure it continues. We can't lose it on our watch: that would be appalling.

GOSBERTON

Ian Walters

There is a blessing in community. It can be expressed through art, through music, through all sorts of ways that the world sees as of secondary importance, but which to me, are very important to the spiritual wellbeing of people. I feel blessed here. It's wonderful, just to value what is here.

WHAPLODE

David Green

The church is there and it doesn't change. It's maintained, and the stonework is made good, but it's one of the few things in life that doesn't change.

SWINESHEAD

Jane Robertson

When Charlie stands and celebrates Communion, he's doing what countless men have done before him for a thousand years or so. There's a continuity that puts everything into perspective, whether you agree with what he's doing or what your faith is. Things like that, or a step worn by centuries of feet, tell you something of the human story.

## THE LIGHT SHIPS

The ancient barques are yet alive!

Alive with the love of those whose unnumbered hands,  
over ages long, have filled their holds with treasures.

The skilled hands which have hewn and sewn, carved and painted,  
bedecking the old walls and timbers with flowers,  
hauling the ropes that sound the bells, ringing out joy,  
and the one which solemnly tolls for departed souls.

Shoals of silvery words swim in pools of sunlight,  
streaming through coloured glass, some caught and thought upon,  
others dart away, lost to the day.

The music comes, the sound waves lapping  
against the shores of consciousness, starting gently,  
then billowing strongly, a storm of chords and notes.

The massed voices raised in praise, now and as always,  
soar up into the roof space; an upturned ship shape.

Our country churches, the arks of preservation,  
sail on through the ages, navigating changes,  
yet remain constant still, to the ever profound.

Faith unfathomable, deep depths of mystery,  
The lightships float on an endless sea.

MOULTON

Valerie Venables



### 3: EVERYTHING THAT MATTERS

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If you stop and look, life can start to seem quite strange. Those spires pricking the horizon between Boston and Peterborough are, when all is said and done, completely useless. Everything else around here is down to earth and productive. Houses, farms and factories, mills and pumps, electricity pylons, wind turbines, the road itself—all built with purpose. Even the truck-stop flags are there to attract passing trade. But every couple of miles stands a huge stone building put up and maintained at great cost—and for what? A Sunday service attended by a handful of people, a wedding and more funerals, a little tourism perhaps...

Philip Larkin (1954)

Once I am sure there's nothing going on  
I step inside, letting the door thud shut.  
Another church: matting, seats, and stone,  
And little books; sprawlings of flowers, cut  
For Sunday, brownish now; some brass and stuff  
Up at the holy end; the small neat organ;  
And a tense, musty, unignorable silence,  
Brewed God knows how long. Hatless, I take off  
My cycle-clips in awkward reverence.

Churches are so familiar that they are easily taken for granted, literally a part of the landscape. There are almost 40,000 churches in



England; 8,000 of them were already ancient when Henry VIII was a boy. Every village has one: it's what makes it a village, not a settlement. Towns have dozens — medieval churches in the centre and newer ones further out, tide marks of their growing populations. They are not all obvious. The 19<sup>th</sup> century nonconformist chapels can be very plain, while new Christian foundations use existing premises or, if they have money to build, adopt a friendly, modern style. The domes and minarets of a multi-faith society add further variety to the urban skyline, while not all buildings that look like churches are now used as such: some have become museums, bars or flats.

Despite this change — much more obvious in cities than Fenland villages — the church and its spire is still visible almost everywhere in England. As a result, the *idea* of a church is so recognisable as to be almost a cliché. Built of stone, it stands in a green ground of leaning gravestones. Its big arched windows glow with coloured glass. Inside, between tall pillars, wooden pews face 'the holy end', where architecture and decoration unite to draw the eye. And at one end, or perhaps in the middle, is a tower, ideally with that sharp needle spire.

#### Nursery Rhyme

Here's the church, and here's the steeple  
 Open the door and see all the people.  
 Here's the parson going upstairs,  
 And here he is saying his prayers.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as interest in medieval architecture grew, antiquarians coined the term 'Pointed' to define and classify its styles. Nowadays, we say 'Gothic', but the old word was more expressive. It is *pointiness* that marks out a church from all other buildings —

windows, arches and steeple all reaching, stretching, pointing upwards, like hands in prayer. It's very difficult to build like this, although, as the longevity of medieval churches proves, if you can do it, the results are not just spectacular but also strong. Pointed arches are less prone to collapse than round ones, which need mass for stability. In the Fens' soft earth, arcades built seven and eight hundred years ago might lean a little, but they still stand firm. They will outlast us.

And the spire is the ultimate in yearning, aspirational pointiness. The prosperity of the Fenlands produced surplus income that was channelled into ever more gorgeous churches whose crowning glory was their spire. Building higher, thinner and more gracefully must have been a kind of obsession here, during the Middle Ages: Gosberton, Holbeach, Spalding, Moulton, Fleet, Donington, Quadring, Swineshead—the list of elegant Fenland spires is long.

This enthusiasm could be dangerous. Lincoln Cathedral's towers were once all topped with spires of lead-covered wood. The tallest, on the crossing, may have reached 525ft: it was certainly the highest structure in Britain at the time. In 1548, it was blown down in a storm; its smaller sisters were removed in 1807. At Surfleet, near Spalding, a stone spire was built onto the existing tower and nearly destroyed it: thick buttresses were quickly put in and the structure saved, though the tower leans six feet out of true. The people of nearby Gedney took note and added a safe little point to their tower, while projected spires at Pinchbeck—another leaning tower—at Boston and doubtless elsewhere were prudently abandoned.

Why this huge effort and expenditure on something so 'completely useless'? Why have people built, enlarged, embellished and maintained these huge buildings for as long as a thousand years, if they serve no purpose?



In setting out his theory of evolution, Charles Darwin contributed to a crisis of faith in Western society whose consequences are still felt. But his ideas also showed that nature does not expend resources without reason. The people who built and used these churches must have had very good reasons for doing so. The obvious explanation is that they believed in God, and that Christianity, in different forms, structured how their societies thought and acted. That much is indeed obvious, but also too simple. Today, when economics might be the orthodoxy that Christianity once was, it is hard to understand the layers of belief and complex feelings people may have had—and disagreed about—in the past. A historical distance brings the danger of thinking we see clearly because we are the point of all that came before. But we are not the last, just the latest. Will future generations really understand what we think now—in all its layered complexity and disagreements—by reading what we leave and looking at our buildings?

We cannot share the views and beliefs of the Victorian Rector who spent so much to modernise and improve his church at Fishtoft. Nor can we think like the fen workers who hung oil lamps in the simple church they'd built at Holbeach St. Johns, or the carpenters who made the wooden screen at Moulton, or the knights who paid for their tombs at Pinchbeck and Gosberton. We can't know what the people of Bicker thought as they saw the great arches of the new stone church being built by the Normans now running the country. The past, as L. P. Hartley wrote, is a foreign country: they do things differently there.

But, since nature does nothing without purpose, we can be sure that each of them was expressing, more or less consciously, freely

and skilfully, something of what was important to them. Their actions say what they believed, who they cared for, what gave them pleasure, what they admired—in short, what mattered to them.

Harry Clark's stained-glass window in Wrangle church is a reverence to the place, the community and the work that was central to his life. In paying for it to be made and placed in the church, he was doing what countless other Wrangle folk had done before: saying something about what mattered to him, in the place where he would be heard now and, if not for ever, at least by generations to come. That is what every church and what everything inside a church says: this mattered to someone.



In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a wool merchant called John Barton built a mansion at Holme in Nottinghamshire. He died in 1491 and is remembered today chiefly for what he had written into a stained glass window in his house:

I praise God and ever shall  
It is the sheep hath paid for all.

Wool was at the heart of England's medieval prosperity and Boston, among other places, made a great deal of money by exporting it to the continent. Much of that wealth was spent enlarging and improving churches like the Stump which still overlooks the market place, though big money is made elsewhere nowadays. The splendid late medieval churches of East Anglia and the Cotswolds are often called 'wool churches' because the sheep did pay for it

all. But the wool doesn't explain *why* those it enriched splashed out on a communal building of little productive value. The money came from fleeces but it was spent for faith.

As the word implies, faith is always debatable. People have faith in what cannot be known. There is no need to believe the sheep can be sheared next spring: everyone knows it. What happens when we die, on the other hand, is a matter of faith. So is the existence of God and everything that flows from that. For all its advances since the Enlightenment, science has nothing to say on these matters. If scientists have a lot to say about them, they do so as people, not experts. Our comfortable, materialistic culture can be impatient with faith, while professing a polite respectfulness of believers that is rooted in another Enlightenment legacy: freedom of conscience.

For some, belief in God is incomprehensible—a little embarrassing or even laughable. Others live with doubt, their views and feelings changeable, uncommitted perhaps or just uninterested, until life's great changes come: a death, a baby. And still others find in faith a defining structure of life: its meaning, purpose and explanation. Among them are many of those who make up village congregations, though there are plenty whose faith is more uncertain and others for whom community is a faith rather than its expression.

It is not necessary to share the beliefs—and there are many, many ways of understanding the Christian message—of those who built, embellished, maintained, financed and used a church to respect the choices they made. We know more about the cosmos than they did but that is no reason to think that our views are more reliable than theirs in matters of faith.



If faith, in a myriad forms, was the foundation of these buildings and their use, it was not exclusive. It does not prevent, then or now, other things being done and said here, other values being honoured and other meanings being made.

Most obvious among those, perhaps, is a belief in community. For centuries the parish church was the only public building in the village. The chancel, with the high altar where the priest said mass, belonged to the lord of the manor, the bishop or an abbey, but the nave, where the people stood during services, belonged to them. The word comes from the Latin '*navis*', a ship. There are obvious parallels between the structure of a timber roof and that of a boat, and in coastal villages carpenters probably did both kinds of work.

But the association is also symbolic. The church holds the community of the faithful like an ark in dangerous waters. That was sometimes literally true in the fens since the church usually stood on higher ground where it would be a point of refuge at times of flooding. The climax of Dorothy L Sayers 1934 detective story, *The Nine Tailors*, sees her fictional village threatened when the sluice gates fail, and people take shelter in the church, while livestock are brought to the churchyard. Though it's hard to imagine from the A17 today, it's a scene that must have occurred often enough in the lives of fenland churches.

Normally, however, the church has been a happier focus of community life. In pre-Reformation England, there were 49 religious holidays—more than most people get today. Their rituals were varied: processions on Palm Sunday and Corpus Christi, beer for Pentecost, well-dressing on Ascension Day in Louth and a bacon-and-egg breakfast for the Easter congregation at Nettleham.

Plays based on bible stories were performed by local people. The Feast of Fools was very popular, even at Lincoln Cathedral, where the clergy let their hair down. While prim churchmen condemned '*carolling in churchyards, miracle plays, and the worship of unworthy saints*' people enjoyed themselves in and around their church.

James Stokes (2003)

Many Lincolnshire parishes sent their players to cry the banns of their play in other communities, as illustrated in the records of Long Sutton and Leverton. [...] Further, many payments to 'the players' occurred on feast days, suggesting religious plays, some of which likely occurred in the church, the church house, or the churchyard. Clearly it was common in Lincolnshire until the late sixteenth century for parishioners to transform their churches and other religious spaces into temporary theatres from time to time.

Times change, and fashions too. The Reformation brought different ideas of what was seemly. With the arrival of nonconformist chapels, people began attending different services on Sundays. Still the parish church belongs, legally and morally, to everyone in the parish and many people have left their mark, not all of them regular attenders at church. If the buildings are often medieval in style and feeling, what they contain generally speaks of more recent times. One reason for that, of course, is that their earlier contents were destroyed when Henry VIII broke with Rome. Churches that had glowed with colour became the airy, white spaces we know now. And the money, craft and care that local people once invested in Catholic artefacts has gone on a more diverse range of things. It is as if the licence people once enjoyed in feasts and celebrations has been transferred onto the objects now placed in the church by a society with more liberties and material goods.



Alec Clifton-Taylor (1974)

Because of all that they contain, the interiors of the parish churches seldom make such a positive architectural impact as the exteriors; from the first moment of entering, there is so much besides the architecture to compete for our attention.

When you push open the door of a village church, you really don't know what you may find. At Sutterton, you step onto the flagstone floor of a lovely light-filled hall, facing curious windows through which trees can be seen. At Weston, ten miles away, the church is so dark that it reveals itself only slowly as your eyes adjust; then you take in the embroidered kneelers lining the pew shelves, each one a different design, like the individuals who take their place for services.

Kneelers are the humblest of church artefacts, but not the least interesting or enjoyable. Sometimes they mark a concerted effort at renewal: Boston's were made to an excellent design following the 1974 floods which had ruined their predecessors. But more often they accumulate over years, even generations. You see patterns from copybooks—an honourable tradition in art—and some, like those marking the centenaries of the Mothers Union and the Guides, that speak of a larger community. But there is mostly lots of individuality and inventiveness, as people depict what they cherish: the church, its bells, Christian symbols, local scenes, music, animals, flowers and lots of abstract patterns.

The kneelers make an impression because there are so many of them. They seem almost to represent the members of the community in their absence. But the village church is full of other artefacts.







Many, like the candlesticks, carved pulpit and eagle lectern, have a religious purpose. Others, such as the embroidered altar frontals and the flowers you find everywhere, honour that purpose. And others still, including the pictorial glass, paintings and statues, are there to lead minds to God. This work can be very fine, aesthetically and in its craftsmanship. Elsewhere, the best would be in a museum, but it is here, serving its purpose, even if the portable items can be taken out only on special occasions.

It would take years of study to know the Christian symbolism that illiterate people once read with ease. Why is the bible on the spread wings of an eagle? Because the eagle has been associated with divine power since Roman times and specifically with John the Evangelist, and because, like the phoenix, the eagle speaks of resurrection. There is not a creature, a carving, even a colour that does not have equally rich meanings. If most of us can no longer read these pictures and symbols, it does not follow that their messages no longer exist. What we see is the result of creative intent, not ignorance or accident.

Equally, it's not necessary to decode a church or share its creators' beliefs to find pleasure and wonder in it, any more than a visitor to a Greek temple has to be familiar with classical myths. Like all great art, this is powerful enough to communicate on its own terms, across centuries and cultures. It only asks whether we are interested and open enough to pay attention.





Compared to most museums the church is very inclusive. It collects all sorts of treasures, including many that only local people consider such, because they know what they mean and why they matter. An old plough; a bier; fragment of a Saxon cross; a priest's shelter for a wet funeral; a table of Tasmanian wood; a disused clock mechanism; a Tudor bench; sundry paintings, flags and banners; the Arms of George IV—this is a small sample of what you might find in a fenland church. And what is placed here (and much is not accepted) is cared for because it belongs. It may or may not have wider importance: in context, it matters.

There are churches so spotless you feel you ought to remove your shoes at the door and speak in whispers. But listening to some of Moulton's elders remembering their youth I was moved by how far the church has relaxed. No more sitting up with your hands in your lap and eyes to the front. There are play areas now, with soft toys and activity tables. Pictures made at Messy Church are displayed and children's art is in the flower festival, beside the creations of award-winning arrangers. Fine work is recognised and valued, whether in flower arranging, embroidery, bellringing or baking. But that doesn't mean people's creativity cannot also be valued as an expression of faith, because everyone matters, because community matters. What is said in church may be as important as how it is said.

It has never been necessary to be rich to make a mark in the church. The tapestry kneeler that commemorates a wedding anniversary, the flowers set in a vase by the window, the painting of the church on a vestry wall—each one speaks of what is important to the people who stitched, arranged and painted them. In the bell chamber

of Gosberton church, wooden boards record the names of the ringers who completed peals of 5,040 Changes, including one in April 1934 to welcome the new vicar.

Board in the ringing chamber at Whaplode Church

Feb,<sup>y</sup> 27<sup>th</sup>, 1775.

Was Rung 10,080 Changes or 84

Peals, by W<sup>m</sup> Jackson Rich<sup>d</sup> Har-  
wood W<sup>m</sup> Money Step<sup>n</sup>. Davis &

Rich<sup>d</sup>. Pottenger, Raised & Settled the

Bells in 7 Hours, & 25, Minutes.

And for the uncounted people whose achievements were humbler or simply less public, there is the parish register, where their birth and death is recorded. Everyone can leave their mark, if not in the PCC minute book then as a name carved in the wall of the tower stair.

On organ cases, glass, chairs, cushions, books and walls are memorials to those who have died. Vicars, organists, bellringers, churchwardens, flower arrangers and many more whose contribution to the church was decades of faithful worship are all commemorated, often with some personal association. Doctors and teachers who served the village are remembered with tributes that resonate long after their last patient or pupil died. And everywhere there is a war memorial, a sombre list of local names.

Abbreviated lives remembered. Flags and poppies. Regimental banners. Wrangle honours eight young Americans killed when their plane crashed on the common in 1944. More happily, a tablet in the church records the night when 14 bombs fell on Bicker and every one failed to detonate. At Gosberton is a stained glass window in the south transept chapel: beneath a motif with crossed keys



and a sword, in a small dark blue rectangle, is written *'And some there be which have no memorial'*. No one, it seems, is forgotten.

In 1991, Cowbit church received the gift of a silver dish with the following inscription:

Presented to the children of Cowbit in memory of Freddy Tanner  
12.6.1936 – 2.7.1941 A London evacuee to Cowbit, Lincs on  
31.8.39 A special little boy, buried in St Mary's churchyard

Fifty years after the event, Freddy's sister still mourned her little brother, and wanted to honour his life in the church where his funeral took place, in wartime, so far away from home. Truly, this is everything that matters.



But I don't want to end on this sad note. If death and remembrance is central to the church's purpose, then so is life and love. Not only the great joyful moments, the weddings, christenings and festivals, but the everyday enactment of community through the church, involving many more than those who gather for the Service.

The Light Ships have seen so much in the course of a thousand years. Years of hunger and years of plenty. Prosperity and hardship. Invasion and civil war. Marriages in every style and fashion, and burials in the rain. Flood, drought and good harvests. In all this they have stood by and for those who made them, witnessing their celebrations and their survival, their high holy days and their griefs, and in their fabric they bear creative witness to everything that has mattered to the people of each village. Static arks, they sail through time, sheltering generation after generation after generation. New beliefs dress in new clothes, but the ship keeps its course, safeguarding everything that matters. This cynical age struggles to tell sentimentality from sentiment, put-on feelings from truth felt. Here it is still possible to see an old memorial and recognise what matters to us, what is true, if we make it so.

After Larkin (1956)

The stone fidelity  
They hardly meant has come to be  
Their final blazon, and to prove  
Our almost-instinct almost true:  
What will survive of us is love.



## APPENDIX

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shared creation is the nature and purpose of Regular Marvels. Each book (and this is the fourth to be completed) exists only because of the trust, generosity and engagement of many people. It emerges through conversation and negotiation, testing ideas, u-turns, moments of inspiration and, naturally, making compromises. It never corresponds to the early vision, but it is richer and more interesting because of that process of co-production.

*The Light Ships* is a shared creation in the sense of containing other many people's words, and because what I have thought and seen, written and photographed, has been influenced by all that I have heard and felt and experienced in this shared process.

There are people whose names are not recorded below, perhaps because we didn't get as far as introductions, because they preferred anonymity or perhaps, unfortunately, because of a lapse on my part. I offer sincere apologies to anyone who has been unintentionally omitted: I met so many people that some names may have escaped me. Please let me know if yours should be here and it will be added to the website. Although as *The Light Ships'* instigator, I am deeply grateful to everyone who contributed, I am also conscious of ambiguities implicit in that gratitude. This is not my book: it is our book.

*Co-producers*

Mike Bainbridge	Geoff Barnett	Phyllis Barnett
Geoff Beba	Joan Beba	Elizabeth Benjamin
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Charles Brown	John Butterworth	Joan Chamberlain
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George Danby	Pearl Danby	Annette Dean
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Ann Fuller	David Fuller	Tim Galley
Jennifer Garbutt	Rosie Gauntlett	Angela Gilbert
David Green	Mary Haresign	Cyril Harding
Mavis Harding	Nicola Harch	Joyce Harness
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Barry Joyce	Joan Joyce	Phil Leonard
Tony Leonard	John Mawby	Tony McDonnell
Liam McManus	Bob Merchant	Rob Mitchell
Ernest Napier	Rachel Naylor	Mavis Orrey
John Parkinson	Joy Parkinson	Ann Pearson
Brian Plummer	Tony Quinton	Dorothy Rate
Charles Robertson	Jane Robertson	Helen Rout
Jean Ruck	Rita Rudkin	Joyce Salmon

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Luke Skerritt	Elizabeth Sneath	Janet Spinks
Pam Stanley	Carrie Staley	Pauline Stebbings
David Stocker	Linda Stones	Michael Strutt
Daniel Taylor	Millie Taylor	Neave Taylor
Bobbie Thorpe	Lou Thorpe	Rex Thorpe
Julie Timings	Penny Toner	Demi Trip
Lucas Turner Grantham	Valerie Venables	Peter Wakefield
Alison Ward	Alan Walsham	Ian Walters
Eric Wayman	Mark Weatherby	Steve Weatherly- Barton
Neil Webster	Lola Westrik	Lester White
Roy Willingham		

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Dedicated to the memory of

**Olive Cook**

ARTIST AND WRITER

1912-2002

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## SOURCES

All text in Section Two is taken from conversations with the people listed as co-producers above; sources for other quotations are given below, with reference to the page on which the citation appears.

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All photographs by François Matarasso