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The Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich



SOLE⁺BAY
CHURCHES

BLYTHBURGH • REYDON • SOUTH COVE
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Annual Report and Financial Statements
Parochial Church Council of Holy Trinity Church
Blythburgh, Suffolk
for the year ended 31 December 2025

Front cover photograph:

Blythburgh Christmas Market, from the new ringing gallery

November 2025

AIMS AND PURPOSES

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Holy Trinity Blythburgh has the responsibility of cooperating with the Team Rector and Team Vicar in promoting the whole mission of the Church, pastoral, evangelistic, social and ecumenical, in the ecclesiastical parish of Blythburgh in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The PCC is committed to enabling as many people as possible to share in worship and parish life at Holy Trinity – we aim to be a fully inclusive church. Our services and worship try to put faith into practice through prayer, sacrament, scripture and music.

In line with the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and in particular the supplementary guidance on charities for the advancement of religion, we try to help people to live out their faith through:

- Worship and prayer; learning about the Gospel; and developing their knowledge and trust in Jesus
- Provision of pastoral care for people living in the parish
- Missionary and outreach work, including a very important ministry to visitors to the church (estimated at 12-15,000 per year)

We are one of the Sole Bay Churches, a Team of 8 parishes sharing two full time clergy, and so we work with our friends across these parishes to pursue these objectives.

Our magnificent Grade I listed church building has a vital role to play in our ministry, being generally acknowledged as an exceptional holy space. It is therefore important that we maintain its fabric in a responsible and sensitive way, acknowledging its history while ensuring its continued relevance in the 21st century.

We take safeguarding seriously and the Parochial Church Council has adopted the Church of England's national policy 'Promoting a Safer Church'. There were no safeguarding incidents reported in 2025.

This report sets out our activities during 2025 and our plans for the future. Sadly, Revd Russ Gant's ministry and leadership was paused for the foreseeable future during the year for personal reasons. This, combined with the retirement of Revd Alan Perry at the end of 2024, placed a greater burden on the remaining retired, but willing, clergy and lay people, as the recruitment process for a new Team Vicar continued, without the leadership of a Team Rector. However, in November Archdeacon Rich introduced Revd Alix Taylor, who was serving her curacy in Beccles, to the Team. At a Team service held in St Edmund's Church, Southwold on 25 November, Alix was licensed to the Team as Interim Assistant Curate.

Despite this upheaval, we continue to share the Good News of the Gospel in our corner of Suffolk. Underpinning our activities and plans are the Diocesan 'Growing in God' themes: Growing in Depth; Growing in Influence; Growing in Number; and Growing Younger.

Worship and prayer: growing the spiritual life of our members and visitors

The service pattern across the Team was revised in August, and Sunday services have been reduced to 25 from the previous 35, however the number of services each month in Holy Trinity remained unchanged. We try to offer a variety of traditions and styles; Book of Common Prayer as well as Common Worship, lay led as well as clergy led, online as well as face to face. Our congregation at Sunday morning services averages around 22, but this swells to over 100 at the major festivals. Of our 'routine' services, choral evensong on the first Sunday of the month led by the Blythburgh Singers under their director Ellis Bell attracts the largest congregation, usually around 60 plus the choir, drawn from across the Team and further afield. Our service for the Blessing of Animals in August continues to attract a large congregation, both human and animal, many of whom are not regular worshippers. In most summers, we offer a simple service in the ruins of Blythburgh Priory as a curtain raiser to the village's Blythburgh Day and this also attracts many who are not regular worshippers.

Our service of Compline via Zoom each Thursday evening has continued without a break since its beginnings at the start of the Covid pandemic. Attendance has understandably fallen since the end of the pandemic but still averages 12-15 people, not just from the Team but from as far afield as Brighton.

The resident school-age population of the village is very small and we do not have a Sunday School or any other regular youth work. But we are very aware of the need to share the Good News among young people. In recent years our annual crib service and Easter Garden activity on Good Friday struggled to attract many children, but they both saw an increase in numbers taking part in 2025. The PCC has discussed various possible initiatives to bring local schools into the church, one of which was an art event in March, commemorating Harry Becker, involving pupils from Wenhas-ton Primary School, which was deemed a great success.

Holy Trinity's worshipping community looks for opportunities to learn more about their faith and to grow spiritually. We have now established an annual Quiet Day, an opportunity for teaching and reflection. In February 2025 this was led by Canon Paul Nelson at St Michael's Church in Beccles.

Pastoral care: being a caring presence in the village and beyond

Holy Trinity has a strong presence and established connections with our wider community. For example, our monthly community café and mini-market and our Christmas Market attract people from our village and the wider area, not just as customers but as helpers too. We also host the Blythburgh Horticultural Society's annual show.

Although we have no formal system for visiting the housebound and others in need, many of our congregation do carry out this ministry. We ensure that our monthly Team newsletter, Heart & Sole, is delivered to every home in the village and that people feel welcomed when they enter the church whether for services, for events, or just to visit.

One of our duties of care to those who visit us is to pay due attention to their bodily comforts. We know that our church can be very cold in the depths of winter, but to improve the heating itself would be prohibitively expensive. The introduction of blankets and cushions to help those who feel the cold particularly keenly has been appreciated. Over the last few years, we have also been looking at the possibilities for providing accessible toilets and this was finally achieved this year (see later in the Report).

We are greatly indebted to Colin Huggins, a good friend to the church, who leads a free tour for visitors every Thursday, come rain or shine – also his able understudies Sonia Boggis and Meryl Doney.

The PCC considers that an important part of Holy Trinity's mission is to support charities in the UK and overseas and maintained its policy of donating 10 per cent of general income to charity. Thus, based on our income in 2024, donations of £2,000 each were made in 2025 to Embrace the Middle East and UNICEF, and £1,000 each to Break and the Sole Bay Care Fund.

We also continued our tradition of donating our collections at the additional services over Christmas to charity, resulting in a donation of £1,280 to Crisis, the charity chosen for Christmas 2024. Other charities supported in 2025 were Pets As Therapy (our Blessing of Animals service), YANA (You Are Not Alone – Harvest Festival) and The David Nott Foundation (Remembrance Day service). The church's collection point for The Lowestoft Food Bank continues to be well supported.

Sharing the Good News of Christ: mission and outreach

We try to do this most obviously through offering opportunities for regular worship and through special services which appeal to those on the edge of the church community. But there is a range of other ways in which we look to share the good news.

The first is through the way in which our church building speaks of the spiritual dimension of life to those who enter it. It has often been described as a 'thin place', where we can feel very close to the presence of God. So for those whose main motivation for visiting may be for the heritage of a Grade 1 listed building but who may then find that it speaks to them in more profound ways, we try to provide Christian interpretation of what they find; a prayer walk to follow through the building; a place for quiet prayer in the Hopton Chapel, and the provision of Christian literature and merchandise on our bookstall. Our prayer board in the Hopton Chapel is well used and we ensure that the prayers which are left there are included in the intercessions at one of our regular services. We also try to ensure that the artworks and other artefacts within the building enhance its spirituality and are in keeping with its simplicity and sense of light.

Even the way in which our church stands within the landscape, standing high above the valley of the River Blyth, acting as a beacon to those travelling through the village on the A12, particularly at night when it is floodlit, speaks of the Good News of Christ. The church can also speak to people attending concerts and other events in the building.

Most of those who marry in the church have few links with the area, but during 2025 our Team Rector strengthened the expectation that they will become part of our worshipping community in the months before their weddings. This has enriched our fellowship and, we hope, has reached out to them too.

Looking after our buildings and land

The October 2023 Quinquennial Inspection of the church building was carried out by Philip Orchard, our church architect. Although there were no major problems identified, minor works were recommended but finding tradesmen to help has been quite difficult. We continue to be very grateful to all those volunteers who help to clean the church, mow the churchyard, provide and arrange flowers, polish the brass and silver, lock and unlock the building each day.

The repair and reglazing to window SAS3 in the south aisle has been completed by Devlin Plummer Stained Glass Ltd of Great Moulton, Norfolk. The family of Peter and Diana Coghill kindly financed this in memory of them both and we look forward to welcoming the family to see the final result. An offer from a member of the congregation to finance the equivalent work on NAN3 in the north aisle has been gratefully received by the PCC and preparatory work leading to a petition for approval is being undertaken. Discussions continued on the potential replacement glass and leading in the east window.

The major work on the west end tower, which had been the source of much preparatory work by Charles Morris and then taken over by Philip Orchard, was completed in late November, just in time for the facilities to be used during our Christmas Market. It is due to be formally opened by the newly appointed Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich in early 2026. Blue Door Development Company of Thorpe Abbots near Diss undertook this in an exemplary manner and the project came in under budget. This work provided two toilets on the tower ground floor, one for use by less able bodied persons who were unable to use the toilet facilities on the line of the old Southwold railway running below the churchyard down a flight of steep steps (which will remain in use). The work also provided a small galley kitchen which functions much better than the old facilities in the south east vestry.

The bell ringers now have a spacious first floor ringing chamber and can be seen from the church through a delightful gallery. Major maintenance work was also undertaken on the bell frame by Nicholson Engineering Ltd of Bridport, Dorset along with volunteers from the Suffolk Guild of Ringers, which also granted funds for part of the cost. An anonymous donor generously provided funding for new bell ropes. Grant funding of the tower conversion was received with thanks from the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, Friends of Holy Trinity, Blythburgh Latitude Trust, and the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. We were also grateful for sponsorship of fittings from individuals, but the bulk of the funds came from a legacy from Rosemary and Lesley Reynolds.

The screened entrance for Blue Door workers from the north door covered the supposed Black Shuck scorch marks but information about them was placed on the screen for the benefit of visitors. Coincidentally Royal Mail issued a set of commemorative stamps on Myths and Legends, one of which featured a design using the church and the hound.

The quest for a suitable digital organ to supplement the pipe organ continues.

Rachael Wilks, with the able assistance of her husband Peter, undertook the mammoth task of compiling a comprehensive record of burials in the churchyard, drawing information from a variety of rather disparate sources held by the church. This task had been outstanding for many years. The record is available digitally so it can be easily searched. It will provide an invaluable resource for the church, for genealogists and for the families of those buried in the churchyard for many years to come.

Churchyard management was undertaken by Charles Morris but the exceptionally hot weather spared him some of the regular tasks! Volunteers helped him to clear the Alexanders and also the ivy growth up the walls. The broken barbed wire fence in the north west of the churchyard was replaced by chestnut palings.

Financial Review

The financial accounts for 2025 are on a receipts and payments basis, having moved from accruals for the 2024 accounts. We are very grateful to Mrs Eunice Crook for carrying out the Independent Examination of the 2025 accounts.

General Fund

Receipts totalled £54,419 compared with £59,839 in 2024. The main reason for this fall was a drop in hire fees received for non-church activities – mainly concerts.

Voluntary income, including gift aid, formed about half of total income. During 2025, with encouragement from the Team Rector, we signed up to the Parish Giving Scheme, though take-up has been limited so far, because the vast majority of the regular congregation already give regularly using alternative means.

We also raise income through fundraising activities – hire fees, profit on sales from our bookstall, and the proceeds of our monthly café/mini market and annual Christmas Market. Together, these accounted for a further quarter of our income in 2025. Finally, interest on the Church Farmhouse endowment fund, £9,307, and income from church fees (for funerals and weddings) accounted for the remaining quarter of income.

Income from concerts and exhibitions and from church fees are largely outside our control and can fluctuate a lot from year to year. Both fell compared with 2024. Income from concerts was considerably inflated in 2024 because of receipts for use of the church for the performance of Curlew River as part of the Aldeburgh Festival, and in 2025 it fell to a much more normal level.

Expenditure from the General Fund was largely routine, totalling £50,398 compared with £51,852 in 2024. The largest item is our parish share (£15,430), which rose by 3.5 per cent compared with the previous year and was paid in full, though not until September because of the need to manage cash flow whilst the tower project was in progress. Donations to charities (£6,000) from our tithe increased compared with the previous year (£5,100) in line with the level of receipts into the General Fund. Church running costs – mainly electricity – totalled £6,974 compared with £6,966. The pattern of other expenditure was much the same as in recent years.

The overall result was a surplus of £4,020 which resulted in an accumulated balance in the General Fund at the end of the year of just over £39,152. We were very fortunate not to have to call on the General Fund to meet any of the costs of the tower project, but we are expecting major maintenance work elsewhere in the church during 2026 which will be a call on this fund.

Reserves Policy

The PCC's policy is to maintain a reserve of 50 per cent of annual expenditure in the General Fund, in line with Charity Commission guidelines. Given that annual expenditure is around £50k, this policy continues to be more than fulfilled taking into account unrestricted and designated fund balances, despite the depletion of the designated funds during 2025. In fact it is fulfilled taking into account only the unrestricted fund balance.

Restricted, Designated and Endowment Funds

Donations for a specific purpose in relation to the fabric of the church, for example donations for the reglazing of windows, are placed in the restricted Fabric I fund. In 2025, a donation of £15,000 was received in memory of Peter and Diane Coghill from their families for the reglazing of a south aisle window.

A number of grants and donations were also received during 2025 specifically for the tower project, and these are also credited to Fabric I. They include grants from the Suffolk Historic Churches Trust, the Friends of Holy Trinity, and the Blythburgh Latitude Trust, as well as donations from individuals to sponsor particular fixtures and fittings in the tower. Grant funding was also obtained from the Listed Places of Worship Scheme to cover some of the VAT charged on the tower project, the bell frame maintenance work, and the Coghill window, though the cap of £25,000 on what could be claimed in 2025/26 meant that around £7,000 of the VAT paid could not be reclaimed.

The other main restricted fund is the Bells Fund, which normally benefits from donations from visiting ringers and fees payable when the bells are rung for weddings but both sources of funds were much curtailed because ringing was not possible for much of 2025. However, the fund benefitted from a grant from the Suffolk Guild of Ringers and also from the Listed Places of Worship Scheme. The Fund was used in its

entirety (£10,196) towards the cost of maintenance work on the bell frame, with the balance being met from Fabric II (see below). The closing balance of the fund was therefore zero.

Our scheme for sponsorship of the church floodlights continued to be popular and benefited from a number of new sponsors in 2025, raising £1,040 including gift aid. This restricted fund is then used to offset the cost of electricity.

The main movement of funds during 2025 was in the Fabric II Fund. This fund results from a major legacy received from the estate of the late Mrs Rosemary Reynolds in 2011. There was no restriction placed on the use of the legacy in Mrs Reynolds' Will but the PCC chose to designate it for major work on the fabric of the church building. The majority of the funds were invested in a Hargreaves-Lansdown managed portfolio with income paid into the PCC's current account and credited to the Fabric II fund. The existence of these funds made the tower project feasible. Thus in summer 2025, the portfolio was sold and most of the funds (£175,553) withdrawn and used to pay for the tower project, and also to meet the balance of the costs of the bell frame maintenance work. At the end of 2025, £33,973 remained in the fund which will be used to pay for the remaining costs of the tower project and also consequent work on the vestry cupboards for which the PCC already have a Faculty.

The main movement in our endowment funds was an increase in value (as at October 2025) of £17,536 in the Church Farm House Fund. The value of this Fund stood at £253,882 compared with the original investment value of £203,358 in 2011.

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The PCC is a corporate body established by the Church of England. Members of the PCC are either ex officio or elected by the Annual Parochial Church Meeting in accordance with the Church Representation Rules. The PCC held 7 meetings during the year, with an average attendance level of 81 per cent. Discussions concerned the planning and implementation of the life of the Church, finance and the maintenance of the fabric of the church building. During its meetings in 2025 the PCC was aware of its responsibility to comply with and to have due regard to the House of Bishops guidance on safeguarding and vulnerable adults. It has been agreed by the PCC that those elected to its membership will not be permitted to take their place on the PCC until the persons concerned have completed the necessary safeguarding training, this training being the Church of England Basic and Foundation courses.

Committees of the Parochial Church Council:

Standing Committee: The only committee required by law. It has the power to transact the business of the PCC between its meetings, subject to any directions given by the Council.

Membership: PCC Chairman, Wardens, Secretary/Treasurer, one additional PCC member.

Meeting of the Standing Committee: The committee met once during the year, to discuss the church's response to a planning application by the Halesworth to Southwold Narrow Gauge Railway CIO to lay a railway track close to the church.

Fabric Committee: This committee has a remit in respect of the church building, churchyard, church car park and the associated fixed facilities (eg lighting, toilets, organ) to:

- Develop proposals to bring to the PCC for repair and enhancement
- Ensure that PCC decisions for repair and enhancement are carried out efficiently and effectively
- Have delegated authority from the PCC to commission minor maintenance works required (below the value of £1,000 including VAT)
- Review relevant risk assessments and to draw the attention of the PCC to any issues arising.

Membership: Fabric Officer (chair), Churchwardens, Treasurer, 1 additional member of PCC

Meeting of the Fabric Committee: The committee met 4 times during the year, each time reporting back to the PCC.

Deanery Synod, Team Council and Christians Together

Arthur Pooley and Jenny Allen are our representatives on Deanery Synod. Charles Morris and Sue Powell had represented Holy Trinity on the Sole Bay Team Council for some years but during the course of 2025 it was decided that each parish should be represented by their churchwardens. Hence Rachael Wilks and Jenny Allen became Blythburgh's representatives. Jenny Allen is also on the Team Council ex officio as

Team Treasurer. Brenda Motley represents Blythburgh as one of the three Sole Bay Team representatives on the Christians Together in Southwold and Reydon committee. These provide the PCC with important links to the wider structures of the church.

Administrative information

Holy Trinity Church is situated in Church Lane, Blythburgh (IP19 9LL). It is part of the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, and a parish within the Sole Bay Team Ministry. The address for correspondence is The Vicarage, Gardner Road, Southwold, IP18 6HJ. The PCC operates under the Parochial Church Council Powers Measure and is exempted by order from registering with the Charity Commission. PCC members who served during 2025 were:

Ex Officio members:

- Revd Russ Gant (Team Rector and Chair)
- Churchwarden: Rachael Wilks (*lay vice chair from 20 May*)
- Churchwarden and lay vice chair: Matthew Sullivan (*until 30 April*)
- Churchwarden: Jenny Allen (*from 20 May*)
- Deanery Synod Representative: Jenny Allen (also Treasurer and Secretary)

Elected members:

- Sarah Britten (from 20 May)
- Roselyn Crane
- Meryl Doney
- Sally East
- Charles Morris
- Sue Powell
- Paul Simmons (also Fabric Officer)

Approved by the PCC on 31 March 2026

Churchwarden/PCC Lay Vice Chair