

# FEAST WEEK SERVICE 2009



1229-2009

780 years of the church in  
Woodhurst

### 1229

It is the year 1229. I am the **Prior of St Ives**. The pope in Rome has replied to a petition that we sent . The reply states *On account of this beloved sons in the Lord going along with your just demands by free consent, we confirm, by our papal authority the church of Slepe and of Wodehurst and of Woldhurst chapels of the same church, which you claim that you have obtained legally, and other goods of yours, just as you possessed them all fairly and peacefully. We confirm to you and through you to your monastery.*

*Let no one at all break this page of our confirmation or go against it with rash daring.*

Slepe is the name of the town, the priory is called St Ives because recently the bones of the Persian saint St Ivo have been found here. The bones have been taken to the Abbey at Ramsey to be placed there along with their other relics.

### 1251

It is the year 1251, the 36<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of King Henry, the son of King John. I am the **Abbot of Ramsey Abbey**. I have received a petition touching the customs of the town of St Ives, Wodehyrst and Waldhyrst. This comes from Robert son of Richeman, Robert Palmer, Robert son of the Smith and John at the church. They say that the parish church of St Ives was founded and dedicated in honour of All Saints; to which belongs the two chapels of Wodehyrst and Waldhyrst, and the bodies of the dead people of Wodehyrst and Waldhyrst were wont to be buried at St Ives, which lately, to the prejudice of the mother church, are buried in the cemetery at Waldhyrst, which is not dedicated. To which church, with the chapels, the abbey of Ramsey present the vicar because the prior of St Ives takes , in the name of the parson, all titheable sheaves at St Ives, Wodehyrst and Waldhyrst and the tithes of hay.

And if a woman shall die, her husband being alive, the best beast shall remain to him, and the vicar shall take the second.

Also for every house having a hearth, the vicar takes a halfpenny at Easter for the lighting for the church.

From a man with out a wife, and a widow a halfpenny.

### 1545

It is 1545. My name is **John Pakye**. I was born in Crowland and for the last few years have been a monk at Ramsey Abbey, where I was the treasurer. There was another monk called John Pakye there, but as I was the younger I was known as John Payke junior. A few years ago King Henry VIII broke away from the church in Rome and declared himself head of the Church of England. Finally, thinking that the monasteries and their Abbots were too rich and powerful he decided to get rid of them In 1539, our treasures and precious books were taken away and the monks were given a small pension and sent to be ministers in nearby churches. I was given a pension of £6 13s 4d a year and sent here to Woodhurst. John Pakye senior who was in charge of the infirmary at the abbey was given £8 and sent to Oldhurst as curate.

As I can read and write both English and Latin I was soon much in demand to help villagers with any documents and have often been a witness or a supervisor for wills. They also pay me to say obits and masses for their souls. John Barregere left 6s for a yearly obit or mass to be said in Woodhurst church on the Monday and Tuesday of Palm Sunday week for evermore. The residue of the money to be bestowed on poor people on Good Friday for to pray for his soul, his friends souls and all Christian souls. Sometimes people left me gifts in their wills. Bawedwayn Leadbeater recently left me his best silk doublet.

**1557**

It is 1557. My name is **Roger Farrington**. I am a husbandman living in Woodhurst. I have a wife Margaret, three sons, Robert, Richard and Giles and 4 daughters Elizabeth, Ann, Isabell and Alice. I have just written my will. The first thing I had to think of is my soul, which I have bequeathed to our lady Saint Mary and the whole company of heaven. When King Henry VIII forsook Rome and became head of the Church of England we could not worship our lady in such a fashion, but since his daughter Mary, came to the throne and restored the Roman Catholic church we have gone back to the old ways. Unfortunately up to the present she has not produced an heir and if she dies and her sister Elizabeth becomes our next Queen, she will return to the ways of her father and we will once more become members of the Church of England.

I have also left 12d for tithes I had forgotten to pay, 12d for the repairs to the bells and 2d to our mother church in Lincoln.

We have seen many changes in our church over the last few years. We used to have a Guild of St John to which both men and women could belong, but that ceased to exist several years ago. We do still have a Cross of St John where we go to hear sermons sometimes. The way to this cross has improved after Robert Plome left 2s to mend the highways to it in 1545

**1624**

It is 1624. My name is **John Christmas**. My family have lived in Woodhurst for generations. In 1621 William Govve and I were the two churchwardens, and had a new bell hung in the rebuilt bell-cote. It was inscribed with our names and date. Now in 1624 a second bell has been hung, there is room for three. This one has been made by W Haulsey and inscribed on it are the words *Hee that will be meri Let him bee Meri in the Lord 1624*

When they rebuilt the bell-cote they also made the walls of the nave higher and put two clerestory windows each side.

**1650**

It is 1650. My name is **John Halsted** and I am the minister of Woodhurst Church. These are difficult times, for the last few years there has been a Civil War in England with the supporters of the King, the Royalists, fighting the Parliamentarians, called the Roundheads. Families have been divided in their loyalties. In this area Huntingdon was for the King and St Ives supported the Parliamentarians. One of the leaders of the Parliamentarians was Oliver Cromwell. He was born and educated in Huntingdon and represented then in Parliament. He then lived in St Ives for a while before he moved to Ely.

Last year the Parliamentarians won and they executed King Charles the First in London..

This year Cromwell sent Triers to every church in the land to ascertain if the Incumbents were carrying out their duties as Parliament wished. Their report about Woodhurst said *Woodhurst is a viccaridge worth £14 per annum having a Chapel belonging to St Ives. Mr Halsted the present Incumbent a preaching minister supplies the said Cure and receives the aforesaid profits to his own use.*

They suggested that Woodhurst and Old Hurst should share a minister, but we are already doing that. In the Protestation Returns for 1641 I am shown as curate at both

Woodhurst and Old Hurst. The Protestation Return had to be signed by every male over the age of 18 years. This stated that the person signing promised to uphold the beliefs of the Church of England. People who didn't sign were deemed to be Roman Catholics and hence not fit to hold public office.

#### 1717

It is 1717. I am **Robert Baker** the curate of Woodhurst and Old Hurst. Every three years I have to fill in a form for the visitation of the Bishop of Lincoln to the Huntingdon Archdeaconry. This year I wrote; *There are 3 score and 15 families in Woodhurst, a half a dozen families are Dissenters, Independents and Antinomians. Old Hurst has 16 families and no Dissenters.*

*I reside in the parish but it is a Chapel of Ease to St Ives and is no vicarage in Woodhurst where I reside; and none in Old Hurst.*

*I do not know of any that come to church unbaptized, we have some single number not confirmed and have baptised no adults.*

*On a Sunday Publick Service performed twice a day. In the morning at one Town and in the afternoon at the other*

*I catechise every Lent*

*The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered in our church three times a year, Christmas, Easter and Whitsun and we had last Easter 12 communicants at Woodhurst and seven at Old Hurst*

#### 1748

It is 1748. I am **Samuel Cooper**, curate of Woodhurst. This year on May 16<sup>th</sup> there was an inspection of the church. I am afraid that there is a lot that needs doing. The report stated that:-

*Walls and ceiling to be plastered and whitewashed; floor of the porch to be level; cup and cover to be mended; plate and napkin, new Bible; Basin for the font; Font to be kept clean; Pavement to be raised and level; Rubbish to be removed;; West end to be clean and paved; Pews to be mended and the floor; Buttress on the North side to be secured; Elder in the churchyard to be grubbed up, and the yew to be kept decent.*

*In the Chancel walls to be scraped, cleaned and whitewashed on the outside to be plastered; walls and foundation to be secured; windows to be cleaned and mended.*

The inventory of the goods belonging to the church shows that we have the following:-

*A Bible and Common Prayer Book*

*Communion cup of Silver and linen cloth for the Communion Table*

*A Basin for the Font*

*Surplice and Hearse Cloth*

*Pulpit Cloth and cushion*

*A Bier and Register Book*

*Three Bells*

#### 1771

It is 1771 and I, Samuel Cooper, am still the curate at Woodhurst. This year when the Archdeacon came for the inspection we had a new silver plate and paten presented by Miss Susanna Brown, the Lady of the Manor. We also had a purple cloth for the Communion Table and a napkin for the same.

**1843**

It is 1843. I am **John Henry Pelly** of Balls Park Hertford and Lord of the Manor of Woodhurst. This year I and my wife Johanna have given one rood of land near to the church in Woodhurst, which is to be fenced off by the vicar of St Ives and his successors. On it is to be built a school for the education of children and adults or children only of the labouring manufacturing and other poorer classes in the parishes of Woodhurst and Old Hurst; for promoting the education of the poor in the principles of the Established church and conducting according to its principles and for the furtherance of its ends and designs.

**1851**

*There was a religious census taken on March 30<sup>th</sup> this year in every church and chapel in England. The figures for Woodhurst were that there were 15 adults in the morning and 36 children. In the afternoon 25 adults and 36 children. There were 20 free sittings and 3 others. There was no inspection to see if figures were accurate they relied on the honesty of the minister. Figures for the Baptist Chapel in the village were children taught in the morning. In the afternoon 99 adults and 50 children. In the evening 87 adults. There were 210 free sittings and 40 other.*

**1870**

It is 1870. I am **James Hempstead Cox** a churchwarden in this church. At the presentment of the churchwardens to an archdeacons presentation, William Morris and myself gave the following answers:-

*The church is in pretty good repair*

*The Chancel belongs to Sir Henry Carstairs Pelly*

*The church is not insured*

*It is warmed by a stove*

*There are three bells but one is cracked*

*The churchyard is in a decent state and is large enough for parish*

*The church has everything for a decent and divine service*

*There is a Silver Cup for Communion*

*There is a service every alternate Sunday*

*There is a service one evening a week*

*No weekly offering*

*Collection taken at Holy Communion the minister takes the money and we know not what use is made of it.*

**1871**

It is 1871. My name is **William White** and I am a church architect. The report made by the churchwardens last year said the church was in pretty good repair. Unfortunately that was not the case. This year I had to carry out extensive repairs. These included:-

Remedying the bulge in the north wall

Build a new roof on the South aisle

A new east window

New Chancel fittings

Covering the bell-cote with oaken shingles

Re-seat the interior of the church.

In 1861 there were 460 poorer people in the village and 61 other people, so I have increased the seating. In the nave there are now 80 seats for poorer people, 40 for children and 28 for other people. In the chancel there are 16 seats for poorer people. This is a total of 164 seats in the church.

The total cost of the repairs and re-seating is £450. I have charged £40 for my commission for this work and £5 for travelling expenses. The Reverend Goldie vicar of St Ives stated that this church was the last in this area to be restored. The church is still £140 short of the funds to pay for the repairs. He said '*Large churches in large populations do not need help in the same proportion as these little places in the wilderness. But here there is no staff to lean on*'

### 1896

It is June 20<sup>th</sup> 1896. My name is **Emmanuel Gurry** and I am a churchwarden of this church. This is a very important day for Woodhurst church as the Bishop of Ely came to consecrate the new burial ground to the north of the church.

In 1894 I wrote to the authorities requesting the discontinuance of burials in the churchyard in front of the church. It had been used for burials of Woodhurst inhabitants for about 700 years. The Home Office agreed to it closing on December 31<sup>st</sup> 1894. The last person buried there was on that date and was an unnamed male child son of Rueben and Mary Cooper.

The land at the rear of the church already belonged to the church in St Ives and they conveyed a piece of that to Woodhurst. The indenture is dated 24<sup>th</sup> December 1895. Before the land could be used it had to be well drained as the water table is high in the village. Plans had to be drawn up for the placement of burials, the plan shows over 250 places; a board of trustees formed and conditions put on who may be buried there. There was a large attendance to witness the proceedings, unfortunately a heavy shower interfered with the outdoor part of them. Afterwards the Bishop and Clergy took tea in the Parsonage.

Woodhurst and Old Hurst Churches have formed a Church Band. There are 18 performers playing a variety of instruments, mainly stringed ones. It is said that the performers enjoy the practices in the Parsonage; which is a very good thing, because people listening outside think that there are a lot of people in great pain.

### 1935

It is 1935. My name is **Mr Rowell**. I am the vicar's churchwarden for Woodhurst. Once again major repairs are necessary to this church. Mr Inskip Ladds, the church architect found that due to the very dry summer of 1934 there is serious settlement at the south west corner. The walls will have to be underpinned. There are several large cracks in the walls. Inferior mortar has been used on the south wall. The cost will amount to £150. So at our Annual Vestry Meeting on 29<sup>th</sup> April we thought about the ways that we could raise money to pay for the repairs. Ideas put forward were:-

Holding whist drives

Having a Sale of Work

Holding a November market in St Ives

Sending an appeal to outside friends

Putting an appeal in the Church Times, Woodhurst having been a centre of Catholic worship for many years.

1968

*By royal proclamation Woodhurst and Old Hurst sever their hundreds of years connection with St Ives and become Chapels belonging to Broughton.*

## **BACK FROM THE BRINK 1981-1990**

### **Sheila Wood.**

My late husband the Rev. Gerry Wood retired in 1982 and we chose to live in St Ives. It was a rather unusual retirement, for no sooner were we settled into our new routine, than there was a call from the bishop, asking if Gerry would be prepared to care for three combined parishes for a while, as their Rector had been admitted to hospital. Gerry was pleased to be of service. These villages were Broughton Old Hurst and Woodhurst. After a few weeks the sick gentleman died and Gerry agreed to continue as Priest in Charge until a new appointment was made. The new situation also proved to be rather unusual for we soon learned that these parishes were to be split up and each one joined with a neighbouring parish. This would obviously take time and for us it proved to be a very happy time, thus starting our connection with Woodhurst.

This beautiful church of St John the Baptist with its 12<sup>th</sup> century nave was in a state of gross neglect and it was obvious that redundancy was on the cards. However Gerry felt that if there was the slightest chance of saving it, surely it would be worth the effort. An open meeting was held when the Archdeacon explained the situation, mainly that it would require a huge effort of time, talents and money if the church was to be saved. It often takes a shock to face the reality that your parish church may not always be there for weddings, christenings, funerals and harvest Thanksgivings. After a few days a second meeting was held when the people had already decided to go ahead with the enormous task if Gerry would lead them, which he was pleased to do. In no time action groups were formed and fund raising events were taking place. Hitherto unknown talents came to light, in the areas of building, electrics and plumbing, paving the way for the professionals to move in. The school summer holiday brought the children in to help digging a drainage channel and clearing mountains of rubbish.

Our family photo album of the time reminds me of Gerry in muddy Wellingtons with willing helpers working flat out. The object of the exercise was to have a church in action at the heart of the village. This was achieved. St Johns became a place of worship again, loved and cared for by those who had shared its restoration. Perhaps it was meant to be that this church and its people were in Gerry's care for longer than Broughton and Old Hurst. I treasure an article in the local press, describing Gerry as 'the temp who stayed for 10 years'. I also treasure the lasting friendships I made in this very special place.

### **Derek Ball**

I was one of the many willing helpers who gave a lot of time and effort into restoring this church. At the meeting that the Archdeacon attended in February 1982 he put forward the possible alternatives for the future of the church.

1. The church to remain open for parish use, but extensive renovations needed to be done, some very urgently, and this would be costly.
2. The church handed over to Redundant Churches Fund, who would decide whether to preserve it or not. Up to 3 services a year and special services could be held.

3. The church could be sold for alternative use. A limited idea as the graveyard would still be used.
4. The church could be demolished; this may cause a problem, as it was a listed building

The meeting was given a month in which to decide what they wanted to do. They decided to repair the church and keep it open.

Some of the essential work that had to be done was:-

1. Repairs to the tower
2. underdrainage around the church
3. South aisle roof to be sorted
4. repointing
5. replastering the walls
6. replace the floor
7. sorting out the pews
8. moving the vestry
9. electrics

For all these projects three things were needed, grants from official bodies, fund raising and covenanting from the parishioners and most of all, volunteers.

### **Catherine Clarke**

In the 1980s VAT had to be paid on all building work, and there was no such thing as Gift Aid. Therefore raising money was a very difficult task, particularly such a large amount by such a small population. We embarked on a series of fund raising activities, from whist drives to Barn Dances and cake stalls in St Ives to Coffee mornings in our houses. There were Summer Fetes, Christmas Fayres and Harvest Suppers, any activity which resulted in making money for the restoration was carried out.

There was an urgency about restoring the church, but it was also an occasion that brought villagers together with one common purpose; to keep our church open and thriving. Groups of volunteers helped in all aspects of the restoration that were not done by the professionals. Mr Lloyd organised the school children during the summer holidays to work on the drain around the church. Plaster and mould was taken off walls, which had to be left to dry out and they were then re-plastered. New kneelers were made and new altar linen. The vestry moved to its present position and pews renovated and some repositioned.

This restoration took a long time. There were so many things to do. The first floor that was laid to English Heritage specifications was not up to standard and had to be re-laid. The final part of the restoration was the renewal of the west window, which was completed in 1990.

The Bishop of Ely came to a Thanksgiving Service in October 1990 to celebrate nine years of hard work by the parishioners. I can remember that in his sermon he said that he looked in the Cathedral records when he knew he was coming to Woodhurst, and found there weren't any records for Woodhurst.. Hopefully since then we have created some for the Diocesan Archive, and we go on making our mark both in the Diocese and in the parish itself.



**1991**

*Woodhurst for the first time in its history is created a parish in its own right and joins Colne and Bluntisham-cum-Earith to form a new Benefice.*

**2008**

*Woodhurst leaves the Bluntisham Benefice and joins the Somersham, Pidley and Old Hurst Benefice; thus renewing the closeness with Old Hurst which began hundreds of years ago.*

### **The Present Day**

In September 2008 the Parish of St John the Baptist Woodhurst became part the Benefice of Somersham and regained the historic link with Old Hurst from a previous pastoral organisation. The core group of Christians underpinned by a strong sympathetic 'fringe' is already seeing growth in the life of the church less than one year on. New initiatives such as the monthly coffee morning on the first Saturday is encouraging people to come and visit the church. The Church links strongly into life in the village and receives excellent publicity on a well maintained and regularly updated village web-site. There is a new optimism abroad in the village and excitement among the people that the growth that has already begun will continue to be blessed by God and empowered by his Holy Spirit. It is always a joy and privilege to come and share in and lead worship at St John's.

Chris Barter  
Priest-in-Charge

