

In 2009 the Diocese of Ely is 900 years old.

*We offer you this set of ten acts of collective worship
to celebrate this anniversary, and as an
encouragement to investigate the story of your own
parish community, yesterday, today and for the
future.*

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About the Diocese of Ely

A diocese is a geographical area, often slightly larger than a county, which is overseen by a bishop. The Diocese of Ely covers the whole of Cambridgeshire, Peterborough south of the River Nene, and West Norfolk. Bishop Anthony Russell is the sixty-eighth Bishop of the Diocese.

1109—The Beginnings of the Diocese of Ely

In 1109 the area we now know as the Diocese of Ely was part of the much larger Diocese of Lincoln. Over in Wales, Bishop Hervey was Bishop of Bangor. The Diocese of Bangor was a wild place in those days, and Hervey was not popular with the Welsh people who saw him as one of the hated English overlords. Following the murder of his brother, he fled from his diocese in fear of his life. Hervey was King Henry I's confessor and the king attempted to find him a new bishopric, meanwhile he sent him to oversee the vacancy at the monastery of Ely which was then without an abbot.

Ely was the largest and richest of the Fenland monasteries, and the monks had, for some time, been agitating to become a cathedral and the centre of a diocese. Hervey supported them in this, and, when the Pope agreed to the creation of the Diocese of Ely, Hervey was "translated" to become the first Bishop of Ely. As a result, the great monastery church (still not fully built) became a Cathedral (cathedra = the seat of a bishop). Thus, Ely Cathedral is technically nine hundred years old as a cathedral in 2009, despite the fact that the first church on the site was founded in the *seventh* century!

In order to give Bishop Hervey sufficient funds to support and administer a diocese, it was decreed that the bishop would be granted half the wealth of the monastery. As you can imagine, the monks complained for years afterwards that Hervey had taken the best and most profitable of their estates!

About these acts of collective worship

This booklet contains ten acts of worship—one on Saint Etheldreda who founded the first church at Ely, and then one for each century of the life of the Diocese. We have drawn our stories from all areas of the Diocese and have tried to include some of the less well known personalities who originated from our area—if you want to read about Oliver Cromwell or the great Cambridge reformers, you must look elsewhere.

We would like to suggest that you begin the acts of worship with lighting candles on a "Diocese of Ely birthday cake", or, alternatively, follow whatever method you use for celebrating birthdays in school.

The prayer used at the end of each act of worship is the Diocese of Ely's anniversary prayer for children to use. Bookmarks with this prayer will be distributed at various children's events throughout the year.

Photographs which appear throughout the booklet may be found online at www.ely.anglican.org/education/schools/collective_worship/2009photos.html where they can be downloaded for use with the acts of collective worship.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **Ely** in the seventh century. It is over four hundred years before the Diocese of Ely came into being. Ely is an island surrounded by a river and marshy fens.

Introduction

Have you ever been to Ely? If you have, you are sure to have seen one of the largest churches in the country—Ely Cathedral. (*See if pupils have anything to share about the Cathedral.*) Have you ever wondered why the Cathedral is in Ely? Why isn't it in Cambridge or Huntingdon? Why isn't it in Downham Market or March? The answer to that question is that the Cathedral is in Ely because of a famous lady who lived in the seventh century. This is her story.

The Story

Almost 1,400 years ago in the palace at Exning (near Newmarket), King Anna's queen gave birth to a baby princess. They called the baby Etheldreda. When Etheldreda was a young girl she loved dressing in fine clothes and wearing pretty necklaces. Etheldreda and her family were Christians, and as she got older Etheldreda began to realise that she didn't want to be a princess after all! What Etheldreda *really* wanted to do was spend her time praying to God and being a good Christian. So she put her beautiful clothes and necklaces away, and began to live in the same way as the poor people. The thing she enjoyed most of all was spending time praising God.

When Etheldreda's father died, things suddenly changed for her. The rest of her family decided that it was time for Princess Etheldreda to get married and they chose a suitable husband for her—Tondbert, the King of the Southern Gyrvi people. Etheldreda was horrified! She didn't want to be a queen at all. She wanted to carry on living as a poor Christian for the rest of her life. But in the end Etheldreda really didn't have any choice about what she was going to do; her family made her marry.

Tondbert gave Etheldreda a wonderful wedding present – a whole island with all the farms and buildings on it! The island was called the Isle of Ely and it was in the middle of the marshy fenland. Tondbert was very kind to Etheldreda, because when she told him how she really wanted to spend her time worshipping God, not being a queen, he agreed that she could do whatever she wanted.

Only two years later Tondbert died and for some time Etheldreda carried on living happily on her own special island. She must have thought that she was safe now and could concentrate on being a good Christian, but her family had other ideas and they found her a new husband; Prince Egfrid of Northumbria. It was an awful shock to Etheldreda, because the Kingdom of Northumbria was hundreds of miles away at the other end of England, and Prince Egfrid was only a teenager and she was thirty – he was half her age! But again Etheldreda had no choice about what she was to do, and she set off on her long journey northwards.

When Etheldreda married Egfrid she explained to him how she didn't really want to be a queen at all, and how the most important thing in her life was serving God. Egfrid seemed to understand what Etheldreda wanted, and at first she had her own way. Etheldreda even left her husband and went to live in a nunnery. However, Egfrid was not really happy with Etheldreda's behaviour at all, because everyone teased him that his wife had run away from him. When his father died, and Egfrid became king, he decided he would order Etheldreda to

come back to court and be a proper queen at last. He took some soldiers and headed for the nunnery—he was going to capture Etheldreda and drag her back!



Etheldreda heard that the king was on his way to capture her, and she decided she would run away - but where could she go? She still owned the island of Ely and knew she would be safe there, so she set off on foot with two of her friends on the long walk south. But as they were walking along the seashore the women heard the thud of horses hooves coming up behind them. The women splashed out to a small island off the shore where they tried to hide. As the women hid the tide began to come in, and when Egfrid arrived there was a deep channel of water between him and the island. Egfrid was not worried—after all, all he had to do was wait for the tide to go out! His men camped opposite the island and they waited..... and they waited..... and they waited.... but the tide just did not go out. On the island Etheldreda and her friends were praying day and night to God that they would be saved, and it seemed to be that God was using the sea to protect them!

After a week of waiting Egfrid got bored and gave up. “Go, if you want to!” He yelled at Etheldreda. “I’ll marry someone who actually wants to be a queen; there are lots of pretty young girls to choose from you know!” The soldiers rode away, and at last the tide went out.

Etheldreda and her friends finally got to the Isle of Ely and there at last Etheldreda was able to live as she wanted to do. She built a church and a monastery, and Christians came to join her on the island and to be monks and nuns. For six years Etheldreda did her best to be a good Christian at Ely. She wore simple woollen clothes instead of rich gowns, she had only one meal a day, and every night she got up at 2.00 in the morning to pray to God in the church until sunrise. She was happy that at last she was doing what she had really wanted to do with her life.

After six years a terrible plague swept through the island of Ely, many people died, and Etheldreda was one of them. Many people wanted to come and see where she had lived and was buried. Over hundreds of years so many people came that bigger and better churches were built for the monks and the visitors. In 1109 Ely was the largest of the great Fenland monasteries, and so it was **Ely monastery**, Etheldreda’s special place, which became the cathedral of the new diocese of Ely.

A Bible Reflection

In the Bible there is a story about a rich young ruler who asked Jesus what he should do with his life. Jesus told the rich man to sell everything he had and give the money to the poor, then to become his follower. The rich man loved his money more than he loved Jesus—he gave up and went home. Etheldreda probably thought a lot about this story, because she was a rich ruler, but she did what Jesus asked in the story, by giving her wealth away and following Jesus. For Etheldreda being a Christian was more important than everything else she ever had or done.

(Check it out: Luke Chapter 17 Verses 18-29)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what’s new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what’s good, kind and true. Help us to know there’s no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the first candle on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **Chatteris**. The Diocese is less than forty years old and the cathedral is half built.

Introduction

Have available several items, some of which are easily breakable (and which you don't mind being broken e.g. tearing up a piece of paper) and some items which are impossible to break. Invite some of your strongest looking children to demonstrate their strength and prowess. You are endeavouring to demonstrate that there are some things which just cannot be broken by human beings unaided. The story today is related to some unbreakable chains—which were broken.

The Story

Almost nine hundred years ago there was a good Christian man called Brythstan who lived at Chatteris. He had many friends, but one man hated him because he was so good—that man's name was Robert Malart.

One night Brythstan had a vivid dream. In his dream he saw a man he knew was Saint Benedict. Saint Benedict was a famous monk; many monasteries in Europe followed the rules for monks that he had written and these were known as Benedictine monasteries. Ely was one of these Benedictine monasteries, and there was another monastery at Chatteris. In his dream Brythstan felt that Saint Benedict was telling him to become a monk at the monastery in Chatteris.

When Robert Malart heard what Brythstan was planning to do he decided he would play a vicious trick on him. Robert went to the authorities and told them that Brythstan was a thief and that he wanted to go into the monastery to escape from the law. It was not true of course, but poor Brythstan was arrested and taken to be tried at **Huntingdon**. Although Brythstan kept telling the court that he was innocent, the judges believed the lies that his enemy told about him. They sent him to London, where he was locked in a dark and filthy dungeon. Because Brythstan would not confess to any crimes, he was treated very badly: he was loaded down with heavy chains, and he was cold and hungry all the time.

For five months Brythstan was left in this miserable dungeon. He spent his time praying to God for help. Brythstan felt that he was going to die.

Then one day a bright light filled the dungeon, and in the centre of the light Brythstan saw three figures. He recognised St Benedict from the dreams that he had before, and he knew that the ladies he saw were Saint Etheldreda from Ely and her sister Saint Sexburga. The three figures came forward and touched his chains. The chains cracked open and Brythstan was free! He fainted with the shock!



When the guards rushed into the dungeon they were amazed at what they found. The door was locked and they knew that nobody had come past them, yet someone had freed Brythstan—and whoever had done it had not unlocked the chains, they had broken them! Nobody on earth was that strong!

The guards believed a miracle had happened. They sent a message to the palace to ask what they should do next, and Queen Matilda sent investigators to the dungeons. The investigators talked to Brythstan and examined the chains. They talked to the other prisoners in the dungeon who had seen the lights and heard the great crash (although they had not seen the three saints). The investigators were also certain that a miracle had happened. They took Brythstan and his chains to the Queen for her to see for herself.

The Queen knew that all this must mean that Brythstan was an innocent man, and God had rescued him. She ordered all the monasteries in London to ring their bells and Brythstan was taken in a great procession to Westminster Abbey for a service of thanks to God. Hundreds of Londoners lined the streets to see Brythstan of Chatteris and his miracle chains.

The monks of Westminster Abbey wanted Brythstan to stay with them, but he decided he would rather go back to Cambridgeshire and become a monk at Ely. He brought his chains with him, and the monks hung them up on a pillar in the cathedral, so that all the visitors could see them.

Brythstan lived the rest of his life happily at Ely. Perhaps you are wondering what happened to the dreadful Robert Malart whose lies had caused all this trouble.... He was arrested soon after Brythstan came home, although it was for a different crime, and he was executed.

A Bible Reflection

What an amazing story Brythstan's was, but did you know there are stories just like it in the Bible? In the very early days of the Church, soon after Jesus died and rose again, many Christians were put in prison. There is a story that Jesus' friend Peter was freed from prison by an angel, and later in the book of Acts there is another exciting story about Paul and Silas whose prison chains were broken open in an earthquake. I expect Queen Matilda and the monks at Westminster knew these stories very well, and this was why they were so excited by what had happened to Brythstan, because it was just like the stories they knew from the Bible.

Of course, this is a rare and special story. You must not think that every Christian who gets sent to prison will be automatically saved by God. Many Christians throughout the world are suffering even today because they are Christians, and despite the fact that, like Brythstan, they have done nothing wrong. Perhaps you can remember them as we say the special Diocese of Ely prayer.
(Check it out: Acts Chapter 12 verses 1-18 & Chapter 16 Verses 16-40)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new.
May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true.
Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the second candle on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first two hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **West Dereham** in Norfolk. Hubert Walter was probably born here. He certainly founded a monastery here in 1188, near his family home.

Introduction

Do you know anything about Robin Hood? He is one of our famous legendary heroes and there have been several TV programmes and films made about him. *Pause here to gather some ideas from the pupils about Robin Hood.* Now this is a harder question—can anyone remember who was king of England in Robin Hood’s time? *You are, of course, looking for the answer Richard I (Richard the Lionheart), but you may receive the answer “Prince John” who was regent. It would be very good if pupils had realised that the king was out of the country (on Crusade) for most of the Robin Hood stories.*

The Story



Do you think Robin Hood was real or imaginary? We are not really sure—most people will tell you he is both, that is that he was real, but a lot of stories were made up about him. The person we are going to hear about today was definitely real. His name was Hubert Walter and he was born in West Dereham. He would have been the same age as Robin Hood, and, if Robin Hood was real, he might have met him!

During his life Hubert had very many important jobs. He became a bishop in the Church and even Archbishop of Canterbury. The king sent him on trips to France, Scotland and Wales to organise agreements and treaties. Perhaps most importantly, he became the chief Justiciar of England; there wasn’t a Primeminister in those days, there was a Justiciar instead. This meant that Hubert was in charge of raising taxes and organising the legal system.

Hubert must have led a very exciting life. Perhaps one of the most exciting things he did was to go with King Richard (and Robin Hood?) to the Holy Land of Israel on a grand Crusade. A Crusade was a great war. King Richard and his armies wanted to go to the Holy Land and capture the city of Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. They believed that it was vital that Christians should be in charge of the city because it was so important to their faith. They probably did not realise that Jerusalem was important to the Muslims who already lived there, because of *their* faith as well.

Well King Richard and his army did not capture Jerusalem—but Hubert did get to go there, because King Richard sent him to the city to talk with the great Muslim leader Saladin. Hubert and Saladin were able to agree that Christian priests could live in Jerusalem and Christian pilgrims could visit the city in safety. The English army could go home!

King Richard was probably very upset that he had not won the Crusade. He set off home

straightaway with just a few friends. He left Hubert with the job of getting everybody else back—the soldiers, the horses, all the weapons and supplies—Hubert had to find ships and transport for them all. But things did not go the way that King Richard planned, he should have stayed with Hubert! King Richard and his friends were shipwrecked on their way home. They tried to make their way back to England overland, but they were captured! When the people who had caught them realised they had captured the King of England, their first thought was “how much money will the English give us to get him back?” They locked him up in the castle at Ochsenfurt and waited.

Hubert and the army stopped at Sicily on their way home to get more supplies, and here they heard the dreadful news that the king had disappeared! All they knew was that he had been captured and was somewhere in Germany! Hubert and some other of Richard’s close friends started searching. They spread out across the country, visiting every castle they came across, trying to find the king. At last they worked out where he was, and Hubert rushed to Oschenfurt. He was horrified when he found out how much money the Germans wanted in order to set King Richard free, but back he went to England and started to use his job as Justiciar to raise the money. It took several months, and it must have been very hard for the poor people (like the ones Robin Hood is supposed to have helped) to raise the money, but they did it!

King Richard was so grateful for all that Hubert had done, that he arranged for him to be made Archbishop of Canterbury. However, once he was back home King Richard didn’t stay in England long—he was soon fighting another war, this time with King Philip of France. And what was Hubert doing? He was raising more tax money for the King of course!

A Bible Reflection

When you heard the stories about all the different things that Hubert Walter did, did you think he was a good man or a bad man? Perhaps you thought he was a good man because he was an archbishop and made peace with Saladin, and because of all the things he did to save King Richard. Perhaps you thought he was a bad man because he fought in a war and because he kept asking the poor people for more and more tax money which they could not afford.

Jesus often found that important people he talked to looked down on other people because they thought they were not so good as themselves. They might have looked down on them because they were poor, or because they were tax-collectors like Hubert, or even because they were women. Think about the people you know in your class or in your family. Sometimes they do good and clever things but then at other times they do stupid and wrong things, and I’m sure that if you think about it, you will agree that you are like that too! Even Robin Hood in the stories didn’t get everything right every time!

One thing we can be sure of, is that Jesus did not turn people away or look down on them. The Bible has a lot of stories about how he mixed with people of all kinds, and how he loved them. *(Check it out; Matthew Chapter 9 Verses 9-13)*

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what’s new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what’s good, kind and true. Help us to know there’s no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the third candle on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first three hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **Wimpole** and at **Wimpole Hall**.

Note for the worship leader—the basic pantomime story referred to below is that Dick Whittington was born of poor parents, went to London to seek his fortune, almost gave up and returned home but thought he heard Bow Bells calling him back, with the promise that he would be three times mayor of London. He then made his fortune by selling his cat..... Although Dick Whittington was indeed a real person, there is no evidence that the rest of the story is true—in fact the bells and cat part of the story may date from as late as the eighteenth century!

Introduction

Have you ever been to a pantomime at the theatre, or have you even been in a pantomime at school? *Which pantomimes can you remember?* If you think about the different pantomime stories that you know, you will realise that they are made up stories with fairy godmothers and all kinds of strange things in them..... but there is at least one pantomime story which is actually about a real person—I wonder if you can guess which one it is?

The answer is Dick Whittington. He was a real Lord Mayor of London. He was Lord Mayor in 1397 (twice), 1406 and 1419.

The Story

Why are we thinking about Dick Whittington today? It is not because he came from the Diocese of Ely, because he actually came from Gloucestershire, but one of his close friends came from our area, and their stories are very similar.....except for the bit about the bells and the cat!

The person we are interested in is William Staundon. He lived at Wimpole Hall in the village of Wimpole. You may have visited Wimpole Hall with your family or your school as it is a very famous house and farm. Wimpole Hall in William's day was not as big and rich as the building that is there today; now it is so huge that William probably wouldn't recognise it at all!

In the City of London in William Staundon and Dick Whittington's day there were some very important groups called "livery companies". Livery Companies were a bit like trade unions, they set people's wages, they checked everyone was selling good quality goods and they trained people in their trade. These livery companies still exist today, over six hundred years later. If I tell you the names of some of them, you will be able to guess exactly which trade they were in charge of— the Goldsmiths, the Bakers and the Basketmakers for example. I wonder if you can guess what some of the others made? What about the Vintners, the Fletchers and the Coopers? (*wine, arrows, barrels*)

William Staundon and Dick Whittington both belonged to one of the most important livery companies in London—the Grocers. The Grocers weren't supermarket owners like Tesco or Sainsburys, instead they were merchants who traded in luxury goods like spices and gold. They sent their ships to strange and exotic places (so everybody thought) such as Byzantium and the Mediterranean.

Each year the City of London elected people to become sheriffs and for the top job of Lord Mayor. Only the most important people in the city got a vote in these elections—the aldermen. Each alderman looked after one area of the city. Dick Whittington was the alderman who looked after the area of London called “Lime Street” and William Staunton was the alderman who looked after the area called “Cheap”. One of the biggest markets in the whole of London was in Cheap.

Dick and William were clearly very important people because both of them got chosen for the top job of Lord Mayor more than once. You already know from the pantomime rhyme that Dick Whittington was Lord Mayor three times (actually it was really four), and his friend William was Lord Mayor in 1392 and 1407. William had a particularly difficult first year as Lord Mayor, because there was a huge quarrel between King Richard II and the people of the city which he had to sort out (he managed it though!).

One thing we know about William and Dick Whittington was that although they had moved to London and made their fortunes there, they still loved their homes where they were born very much. William, for example, paid for an extra chapel to be built on the side of the church at Wimpole, and for repairs to the main church building. *If you visited Wimpole Hall did you go into the church next to the house? If you did, you will have seen the chapel William paid for and you may even have seen where he was buried.*

William also cared about the poor people who lived on land he owned at **Wimpole, Arrington and Whaddon**, and so when he died he left enough money so that every Lent they could be given herrings and bread. This might not sound very much to you, but remember that many ordinary people in William’s time could not afford enough to eat, so extra food like this would be a wonderful gift.

A Bible Reflection

I wonder why nowadays we still put on pantomimes about Dick Whittington and not his friend William Staunton of Wimpole? Perhaps it was because Dick kept telling everyone his story about the bells of London and his cat, and someone thought “that’s a good story, I’ll write it down” and then everything else just happened. This is the kind of thing which happens in history books all the time. It happens in other books too, like the Bible—if you look at the very end of John’s Gospel in the New Testament John apologises that he has only been able to tell us a few of the stories of Jesus. “If I had written it all down” said John, “I don’t think the whole world would have been big enough to hold all the books!” I wonder what stories of Jesus we have lost? What do you think?

(Check it out; John Chapter 21 Verses 24-25)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile
and look forward with hope to what’s new.
May we join hands in a circle of friendship to
keep safe what’s good, kind and true.
Help us to know there’s no end to your love and
that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

On the left of the building is the strikingly large chapel William Staunton added to the small church at Wimpole.



Light the four candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first four hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **St Ives** in the late Medieval period.

Introduction

Have you ever been to an airport when you have been going on holiday? *Discuss how long you have to wait in airports for your flights, and all the different things you can see and do while you are waiting to fly.* I wonder if any of you have ever noticed a little chapel or prayer room in the airports? The chapels are not normally in the main part of the airport next to the shops or the cafes, they are usually tucked away in an area where people can be quiet. Why do you think people might like to pray or be quiet before they go on a journey?

The Story

Five or six hundred years ago, of course, there were no aeroplanes and no airports, people went on journeys on foot or on horseback, or perhaps on a cart or a boat.. Journeys took much longer than they would today and they could be much more dangerous; people would often get very worried about going on a trip.

At this time St Ives was a very busy place. There was a priory (monastery) there, and lots of traders came to the town because of this. Every Easter one of the biggest fairs in the whole of England took place outside the priory gates and people would travel for hundreds of miles to buy and sell things at the fair. A special St Ives market still happens every Monday, hundreds of years after it was started by the monks!

If you have visited St Ives you will know it is on a river called the River Great Ouse. Hundreds of years ago, the monks of St Ives and **Ramsey** paid for a bridge to be built over the river. At first this was a wooden bridge, but they had to keep paying for this to be repaired, so in the 1400s they decided they would build a stone bridge over the river. This was when the monks had the idea of building a new little church or chapel for all the visitors and traders who came to St Ives to pray in— somewhere they could go to give thanks to God for their safe journeys. Where do you think they built the chapel? Why, right in the middle of the bridge of course! This was where everyone who came into St Ives would pass it, and, the monks hoped that this meant



people would want to go in. The monks named their little chapel after St Ledger.

Chapels on bridges are very special and rare, you will have to go all the way to Yorkshire to find another one like the one at St Ives.

You can see from the photograph that the little chapel on the bridge is still there at St Ives. I wonder how many hundreds of people have stopped there to pray, and what exciting places they came from? We can't answer that question, but we can tell you some of the story of the St Ives bridge and what happened next to the little St Ledger Chapel.

Those of you who know about King Henry VIII may have guessed that he ordered the priory at St Ives and the monastery at Ramsey to be closed, so after the 1530s there were no more monks to look after the bridge. The little chapel was turned into a house. A hundred years later half the bridge was blown up, to stop King Charles and his army marching through St Ives on their way to London, then there was a terrible fire and afterwards the little chapel had to be rebuilt. The chapel has been used for lots of different things since then: as well as being a house, it has been a pub, a tollbooth where people collected taxes from people who used the bridge, and for a while it was turned back into a church again. Now the chapel is a tourist attraction and you can go and see it when you visit St Ives and think about all the different things that happened there.

A Bible Reflection

When you read the Bible you will find a lot of stories about people on long and difficult journeys, and also messages about how important it is to look after travellers and strangers. The monks of St Ives and Ramsey were remembering to look after strangers as if they were Jesus Himself. We are often welcoming strangers in our towns and villages too because people move into the Diocese of Ely from all over the country and all over the world. Let us spend a moment thinking about how we welcome new people into our area and into our school.

(Check it out; Leviticus Chapter 19 Verses 33-34)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true. Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the five candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first five hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are in **Cambridge** in Tudor and Stuart times.

Introduction

Set up two choosing exercise with five or six items e.g. coins of different denominations; sweets of different sizes; interesting and boring postcards—whatever you have available. Spread out your first selection of items and invite the appropriate number of children to come up and select an item each—there will probably be some hesitation and thinking, and the best items will be taken first. Ask the group if they think the items have been fairly divided up.

Now repeat the exercise with the second set of items, covered with a cloth or similar. This time as the children come up they are to take the first item in the row as it is revealed — there is no choice per se (except for the choice not to take the item). Discuss with the assembly which of the processes was the fairer of the two.

They have seen “Hobson's Choice” in action.

The Story

Our story today is about a postman called Thomas Hobson. Because it is the Tudor period, we don't mean a postman with a bicycle or a post van, we mean someone who carried post between two cities on horseback, or on a coach. Thomas Hobson lived in Cambridge. People brought their letters to him at his stables in Cambridge, and they were taken down to the Bull Inn in London to be collected. A lot of the letters Thomas carried were special deliveries for people at the University of Cambridge.

As Thomas Hobson got richer, he bought more and more horses and started to employ more postmen (they called them “couriers” like motorbike couriers today). He started hiring his spare horses out to people who needed a horse just for a day or two, it was rather like people hire cars today when they go on holiday. Thomas noticed that when people hired his horses, they liked to go into the stables and choose a horse for themselves. *What do you think happened?* You've guessed that the best horses—the strongest ones and the fastest ones were always chosen first. This meant the best horses got worn out, and the older and slower horses didn't get enough work.

Thomas decided that he had to change things. He started telling his customers that if they wanted to hire one of his horses they must take the one that was in the stall nearest the door. Whichever horse it was they had to “take it or leave it”, it was just like our second group of volunteers couldn't decide which sweet / coin /etc they would take, they had to “take it or leave it” too! If someone complained they had to take a slow horse, Thomas would just tell them “well you'll have to ride slower then!”

It wasn't long before people started calling “take it or leave it” “Hobson's Choice”, after Thomas Hobson. Do you know, over three hundred years later, people still use the expression “Hobson's Choice” when they are talking! When you get home today, see if your Mum or Dad, or your Grandma or Grandpa know what it means!

It is amazing to think an ordinary person like Thomas Hobson is still remembered for something as simple as the way he looked after his horses— but I wonder if he was famous for anything else? If you live in Cambridge you might have seen a conduit he paid for. The conduit was a watercourse which brought fresh drinking water from Nine Wells at **Great Shelford**, through **Trumpington**, into the city of Cambridge. This was very important at the time when the houses did not have any plumbing or drains. The conduit can still be seen with water flowing through it—but people don't need to use it for drinking water any more! We also know that Thomas gave gifts of land and money to help the poor people of Cambridge, **Chesterton**, **Waterbeach** and **Cottenham**, so many people remembered him as a kind and generous man.



*Some of you may even have been to **Anglesey Abbey** near Cambridge, if you have, then you will have visited the place Thomas Hobson once lived.*

A Bible Reflection

How good it was that Thomas Hobson was remembered for being good both to people and animals. We know that Thomas loved the Bible, because one of the things he did was buy a Bible to give to St Benedict's Church in Cambridge. I wonder if one of his favourite passages was where Jesus talked about the two great commandments which were to love God and to love your neighbour. Certainly Thomas Hobson showed that he loved his neighbours by the way he tried to help them.

(Check it out; Luke Chapter 10 Verses 26-28)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true. Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the six candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first six hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

It is the seventeenth century and we are in the Fens, in the village of **Welney** in Norfolk.

Introduction

Have available some small sweets, enough for all children and adults present. Begin the assembly by sending some volunteers to distribute these around the room with secret instructions to count how many people forget to say “thank you”. Check with your volunteers what happened and, as long as all has gone well, praise the assembly for remembering to give their thanks.

The Story

You have just been given something very small to enjoy and you remembered to say “thank you” - today’s story is about someone who needed to say a huge thank you to the people who helped him.

You already know that hundreds of years ago a lot of the area in which we live was Fen. The Fens were wild, watery places where people lived on islands and many of them made a living farming, fishing and hunting. There was often a lot of illness as the land was so wet, and people suffered from malaria which made them feel exhausted and gave them the shakes. Sometimes the rivers flooded and burst their banks and farms and houses disappeared under the waters.

This sounds rather miserable doesn’t it? Yes there were areas of smelly, oozing, mud in places, especially in the Winter, but the Fenmen loved their very different land. They made a lot of money catching fish and growing reeds for the roofs of the thatched cottages, or collecting and selling salt—they did not want to change the way they lived at all!

It must have come as a great shock to the Fenmen when they found out the government was going to drain their land. Soon experts from Holland started to appear in the Fens, then workmen from Holland and Scotland followed them, and work started on digging huge ditches and dykes.

One man came from London to help with the project, his name was William Marshall and he was a lawyer. Poor William got lost in the Fens and was soaked through and very, very cold. He was soon very ill, so ill that he thought he was going to die. The kind Christian people of Welney rescued him and looked after him until at last he was well again. William never forgot them—he knew they had saved his life, despite the fact that they probably did not like him because they knew he was one of the people who was changing their Fens for ever.

Twenty years later the people of Welney had a huge surprise. When William Marshall died in 1661 he left all his land to them. He asked them to spend the money on a church, a school and on anything else the village needed.

Over the last three hundred years William Marshall’s Charity has paid out hundreds of thousands of pounds to the people of Welney. In 1832 it paid for a new bridge out of the village, and in 1848 the William Marshall School and a new church were built. Villagers over the

years have been given money for training, and poor widows have received pensions. What a wonderful gift William had given Welney!

Back in the 1640s the villagers of Welney had followed Jesus' teaching to care for sick people and strangers. They had not expected any reward for doing what was right, but the reward was so huge that people are still grateful to them and William Marshall for their kindness today.

A Bible Reflection

You may know Jesus' famous parable story called the "Good Samaritan". In this story a badly injured man is rescued and helped by someone he thought was his enemy. Jesus told the story to help people realise that every person in the world counts as our neighbour, and we should be ready to help them, whether we like them or not, or whether we know them or not. In the story today, the people of Welney knew that William Marshall was one of the many people who was changing the Fens and their way of life for good. Many people who lived in the Fens did not like this, and you can read stories about Fenmen who went out in the night to break down and ruin the work the drain diggers had done. We don't know what the people of Welney thought of William and his work, but we do know that they acted like the Good Samaritan in Jesus' story and looked after their "neighbour".

I wonder what we would have done if we had lived in Welney when William Marshall fell ill?
(Check it out: Luke Chapter 10 Verses 25-37)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new.
May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true.
Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

William Marshall School at Welney



Light the seven candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first seven hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

We are at **Burrough Green** in south-east Cambridgeshire, near Newmarket.

There are copies of the photograph and the reading below at http://www.ely.anglican.org/education/schools/collective_worship/2009photos.html for you to use with this worship.

Introduction

Do you enjoy riddles? See if anyone can tell you a riddle—perhaps one of the groan jokes current at the moment! (You could even tell some yourself!)

Here is a reading which is something of a puzzle, but not quite like our dreadful jokes. If you were at school three hundred years ago you might have found this in your reading book. Let's see if you are as clever as children three hundred years ago and can read this. *(Undoubtedly your children will be able to read it—but can they explain it? Perhaps a house point would be in order for the person to decipher the story)*

**“Ben has a nag and a gig,
The nag is fat and big,
The gig has a fat pig in it,
The fat pig can dig.
Bid Fan get Ben a fig.
It is on the lid of the can.
Did Fan get the fig?
No, she ran and hid in the van.
Fan is in the van yet.”**



The Story

I think we could all read the words on the slide very easily, but that didn't mean it was easy to understand! There are several words in there which we still use, but which mean very different things today than they used to do then. *Can you tell me which ones you think they are? (Nag (horse), gig (a lightweight horse drawn coach), can (saucepan), van (cart))*

What this tells us is that life was very different three hundred years ago. One thing that is certainly different is that children just like you probably didn't go to school at all. Only fairly rich families could afford to send their children to school or have someone teach them at home; poor village children or poor town children would go straight to work instead of going to school. Sometimes families would send boys to school, but girls would be expected to spend their time learning to cook, sew, and how to look after the home. How would you have liked that?

But about three hundred years ago, even a little earlier, changes were beginning to happen. Around the country vicars and their churches were starting to set up schools for the children in their villages. Some of these schools are still around today, you may know them, because schools like Barnabas Oley in **Great Gransden**, and William Westley in **Whittlesford** are still

called by the name of the vicar who started them.

Show the photograph

These statues are on the school building at Burrough Green. This school is three hundred years old, so these statues show us what the children of Burrough Green were like three hundred years ago. *What can you tell me about them?*

Three different vicars of Burrough Green left money or land to help this school, they were called Dr Cage, Dr Watson and Dr Knight. They gave instructions about what the children should be taught. The children learnt how to read and to write and to do arithmetic. They had two assemblies every day (*i.e. morning and evening prayers*) and were expected to go to church on Sunday as well! They were probably also taught some of the skills they would need to make a living, such as sewing or mending shoes. The school day could be very long indeed: in the summer children would go to school from five or six in the morning to eight or nine at night. In the winter the day went from six or seven in the morning until seven or eight at night.

I wonder if these statues were painted when they were new? What colours do you think they might have been? If they were painted I expect the three messages on the statues would have stood out really well. Can you see any of these messages now? It's not easy! *The answers (in order of legibility) are : on the border surrounding the girl is "Train up a child"; on the boy's border is "Naked and Ye Clothed Me"; and on the girl's scroll "Come Ye Children".* These messages on the statues were meant to show the children how much the church and the people of the village cared about them. They wanted them to know that Jesus loved them, and they church would support them, and help them learn. Does this help you guess what the books the statues are holding might be? They are a Bible and a Prayer Book, because when the children could read well enough they left school and were given a Bible and a Prayer Book to keep.

We have talked a lot about Burrough Green School today just because it is the only school in the Diocese of Ely with these interesting statues, and it is also one of the oldest schools in Cambridgeshire. Do you know how old *your* school is? If it is a church school, like Burrough Green, then it could be two or three hundred years old. Perhaps you still have some of your old buildings as part of the school, like Burrough Green, or perhaps you have moved into new school buildings. If you are a community school your school could still be over a hundred years old, perhaps a lot more. I wonder how many children have gone to your school in all that time?

A Bible Reflection

In Jesus' time people often thought that children were not very important and they would ignore them or push them out of the way. There is a story in the Bible about how even Jesus' disciples tried to do this, and when children came to see Jesus they pushed them away. Jesus was just the opposite; he told his disciples that they must let the children come to see him and that children were important to God too. This is the Bible story that the writing on the girl statue's scroll is about. What an important message that is to put on the outside of a school!
(Check it out; Matthew Chapter 19 Verses 13-15, Mark Chapter 10 Verses 13-16)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true. Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Light the eight candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the first eight hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

It is the nineteenth century, and we are in **Wisbech**, on the Cambridgeshire / Norfolk. Border.

Introduction

I wonder how many of you think you might like to do the same jobs as either your Mum or your Dad, or even your Auntie or Uncle when you leave school? *Take time to ask pupils who indicate that they want to follow in someone's footsteps what kind of thing they actually want to do.*

The Story



When Octavia Hill was born in Wisbech her parents were both working hard to help people who were poor or suffering.

Octavia's father, James, ran Wisbech's first ever newspaper; he called it "The Star in the East". James was horrified by how selfish rich people often were, and how they made the poor people of the town suffer so that they could make more money. James said that his newspaper would "tell the Truth, the whole Truth and nothing but the Truth" and he used his paper to write about all the things he thought were wrong in the world. Do you think he was popular?

Octavia's mother Caroline ran a school, and in the evenings she opened the school up for adults who wanted to come and get an education. At this time many poorer people would not have had the chance of education when they were children, because they would have started work as soon as possible to earn money to live. Caroline's father, was Dr Thomas Southwood Smith, a well known expert who taught his granddaughter Octavia all about the terrible homes the poor lived in, he spent his life campaigning to get decent houses for them .

With a father, a mother and a grandfather like this—what do you think Octavia would want to do when she was older? In fact she did so much that she became far more famous than all three of them—here are just two of the very important things she did:

In 1851, when she was thirteen, Octavia's family moved to London. Octavia was horrified by how much worse conditions were for the poor in London than in Wisbech. As soon as she could, Octavia started a school for children, and began visiting poor families in her neighbourhood. She often found whole families, father, mother and all the children, living in just one small room. The rooms were dirty, dark and unhygienic, there was a lot of illness and often people went hungry, because they could not afford food. The landlords who owned these terrible houses made people pay huge rents, so that they had little money left for anything else.

What would you do to help them if you were Octavia? You could take some food to your poor neighbours—but that would only help for a short time, and all the problems would still be there.

Octavia needed a long term solution. Her answer to the problem may surprise you—she started buying the buildings the poor people lived in! She was able to repair and improve the houses, charge the people fair rents, and make sure that families had enough rooms to live in and were not so cramped. Octavia even tried to help people find jobs, so that they could afford to look after their families.

Soon other people began finding out about Octavia’s work. They wanted to support her, so they gave her money to buy more buildings. Some of the houses were owned by the Church, and when the Church saw what wonderful work Octavia was doing, they asked her to run their buildings too, soon she even started designing new estates of family homes. Later the Government asked her to help them by joining some of the national committees trying to help the poor. Although it is now almost a hundred years since Octavia died, there is still an “Octavia Hill Association” which provides homes for families with low incomes, just like Octavia did, and you may know of other Associations, such as the Hereward Association, which do the same work in your area.

But we haven’t told the whole of Octavia Hill’s story yet! Remember how she was born in Wisbech and then moved to London when she was a teenager? We know that Octavia loved the countryside of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk, and when she moved away to the city she missed all the fresh air and country walks very much indeed. She soon realised that as people built factories and cities wherever they liked, huge parts of the beautiful English countryside were beginning to disappear, and lovely old houses were being pulled down. Octavia and two of her friends decided they must do something to save all the beautiful places they loved, not just for themselves, but for everyone else too—and for you and for me today as well. In 1895 they founded the National Trust. Perhaps you have visited one of the places the National Trust now owns, places like **Wimpole Hall** and **Anglesey Abbey** or **Wicken Fen**. The National Trust now cares for over 160 great houses and 19 castles, it looks after forests, beaches, nature reserves and whole villages, and it owns over 700 miles of coast in Britain. Today we can visit all of these places because of Octavia Hill and people like her.

A Bible Reflection

Do you remember Octavia’s father called his newspaper “the Star in the East”? I wonder if you remembered where in the Bible there was a famous “Star in the East” when you heard this name? It was in the Christmas story, when the Wise Men followed the star to where Jesus was. The star was like a message of hope for all the people in the world because it was a sign of the coming of Jesus. Octavia was like her father, she wanted to bring hope to the poor of England in the name of Jesus, and just like Jesus himself she loved and helped the poor, and what a great job she did!

(Check it out: Matthew Chapter 2 Verses 1-12)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what’s new.

May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what’s good, kind and true.

Help us to know there’s no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

Octavia Hill’s birthplace on the South Brink of Wisbech.



Light the nine candles on the Diocese of Ely birthday cake to remember the nine hundred years of the Diocese of Ely.

Where in the Diocese of Ely are we?

It is the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and we are at **Holme**, which in those times was in north Huntingdonshire and was a long thin parish on the edge of the Fen. Today Holme Church of England Primary School is said to be the school furthest below sea level in England!

Introduction

Begin by setting some of the children a difficult but not impossible task to do—threading a small eyed needle for example. Talk together about how sometimes things seem so difficult that you just want to give up, but that usually you can think of a way to solve a problem if you want to (then use a needle-threader to thread the needle!). The story today is about someone solving a problem.

The Story

In 1895 the Bishop of Ely sent the Reverend George Broke (*pronounced Brook*) to the parish of Holme. What a strange place it was! George soon found out that he could not visit many of the people in his parish—the roads were so dreadful that for half the year they were thick with mud, and for the other half of the year they were so badly rutted that you could not drive a cart or a coach down them. Then George had a wonderful idea—the roads were dreadful, but there were nine miles of river and canal in his parish—he would build a floating church and sail it to where the people lived!

George and his wife Mary went out to check the height of the bridges in the parish—they needed to make sure that their floating church could fit underneath. Then they asked a boat builder to make a wooden building just ten metres long, three metres wide and two metres high, and fit it on a barge. They had a mini-altar made, and a tiny font, and even bought the smallest organ they could find. They calculated that they could squash nearly fifty people into this little space, but was this going to be big enough? In the end they asked for the windows to be made so that they had hinges on the top and could be hooked to the roof— that way, George thought, people could sit on the river bank and listen to the service through the windows!

What should the new church be called? Usually churches are named after saints, so this floating church was named after St Withburga. Do you remember the assembly story about Queen Etheldreda at Ely? Withburga was Etheldreda's sister, so it was a good name to choose for a church in the Diocese of Ely.

Soon George had worked out a rota for the floating church. The church was moved round three different mooring places. Every Sunday George took two morning services at his church in Holme and then cycled (wearing a cassock) to the floating church for an afternoon service. He then had to cycle back to Holme in time for the evening service there. It was exhausting! George wrote in his diary one day: "I nearly went into the dyke riding back. The pedal hit my (leg) and the muscle knotted so that I can hardly walk."

During the week the churchwarden of St Withburga's would use his horse to tow the church back to the base at **Stokes Bridge**, then at the weekend take it to the next mooring spot. George and his wife didn't only visit the church on Sundays—they went back during the week to take choir practices and Bible classes. How difficult this all was, especially in the winter! Sometimes

George set off on his bike over the frozen track and when he reached the place he was expecting the floating church to be... it wasn't there! It was frozen up somewhere else! Another time when the church hadn't arrived, he found that the barge-horse had been frightened by pigs and had refused to pull the church past them!

The families that lived out in the fens were amazed and delighted that the vicar cared enough about them to bring the church to them. At first the numbers who came to the floating church were very good, but as the weather got bad, or people had work to do elsewhere the numbers went up and down. Sometimes people stopped coming to the services because they got "seasick" as the church was rocking all the time! When George cycled out from Holme he never knew whether he would find sixty people, or perhaps only six, waiting for him!

I think you will understand how difficult it was for George Broke to keep the floating church going. He was often ill because of the all the trips he had to make in dreadful weather, and then when the church needed repairs he couldn't manage to pay all the bills. In the end he decided he must let the church go.

*(This was not the end of St Withburga's church because Reverend F. G. Guy at **Manea** asked if his parish could use the barge for a while until they built their own church. After this it was sold and sank in the 1912 floods.)*

Don't you think a floating church which you can move around is a good idea? Although St Withburga's church doesn't exist any more, you can still see a real floating church like it in London. It is called St Peter's Church and it is in London Docklands.

A Bible Reflection

The last thing that Jesus told his friends and disciples before he left them was that they were to take his message to the ends of the world. He promised them that he would be with them wherever they went. Christian missionaries have indeed gone all over the world, to Europe and Africa, to America and Asia, and they have had to face difficulties and dangers wherever they went. Perhaps George Broke felt a bit like he was going to the end of the world when he went to Holme, just because it was so difficult to reach his parishioners. When he was cycling or walking miles in the snow, or when the floating church started to leak, or when he became ill with all the hard work, he must have remembered Jesus' promise to be with him wherever he went. This is what gave him the strength to keep going. That promise is still true for all Christians today, whatever happens in their lives.

(Check it out; Matthew Chapter 28 Verses 19-20)

Prayer

Let us look back with great thanks and a smile and look forward with hope to what's new. May we join hands in a circle of friendship to keep safe what's good, kind and true. Help us to know there's no end to your love and that we need always to love you. **AMEN**

See over the page for photographs of St Withburga's Church, courtesy of Holme PCC. If you would like a copy of "The Fenland Ark", which tells the story of St Withburga's in more detail, please contact Adrian Lawes [adrian@lawesa.freeserve.co.uk].

These ten acts of collective worship have picked out ten different locations in the Diocese of Ely, maybe one of them was in your area and your children knew it well. There must be many other interesting stories about **your local parish church** and the parish communities you serve—would one of these make an interesting act of collective worship? There are sure to be people in your locality who will be able to share stories with you, even if they themselves do not feel able to actually lead the act of collective worship themselves. You don't know if you don't ask! (Check it out; "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" Hebrews Chapter 13 Verse 8.)

Will you be bringing your school to the Cathedral for the big Schools' Days in October? If you are, we shall be asking you to bring with you a display about the story of your local parish—past, present and future. The displays will become part of a mobile collection which will be shown around the Diocese for the rest of the year. Why not ask your local church or parish hall to borrow the collection for a few days? Or could you even host it yourselves and let the community in to see it? If you are interested in this, contact shirley.hall@ely.anglican.org 01353 652712.

If you would like to undertake more work on bishops and dioceses, try www.bishopsinaction.com This is a multicultural website which looks at the role of bishops across the Anglican Communion with a wealth of materials accessible to primary aged children.



St. Withburga's - The Floating Church of Holme. Interior 1897.

Published by Holme P.C.C., Holme, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.



St. Withburga's - The Floating Church of Holme at her mooring, Stokes' Yard, 1897.

Published by Holme P.C.C., Holme, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.



St. Withburga's - The Floating Church of Holme. Moored at Allen's Engine, 1897.

Published by Holme P.C.C., Holme, Peterborough, Cambridgeshire.