

**Church:** St Andrew and St Peter, Blofield

**Interviewee:** A2 – Revd Paul Cubitt

**Date:** Friday, 10 July 2015

---

1. NW: Could we start by, could you outline how long you were at Blofield?
2. A2: I was at Blofield for seven years starting in 2007, to 2014.
3. NW: And the building project that was proposed there, at what stage did that come along, and how did it come along?
4. A2: It started coming about, its genesis would have begun 18 months [after] having been part of the church there. There were a number of issues that were raising their ugly, difficult, challenging head at different times. One of them, we had one room, and that was the downstairs vestry under the church tower; that was the only room we could use for any kind of Sunday School work, and the numbers were growing, and there was nowhere to expand to. The village hall was a long way away, there was no church hall, all we had was this very, very large church building. So how do you, how do we deal with the numbers of children? We lacked storage space as well, so junk filled up every corner you could find. Some Sundays we had a worship band, and to have a little run through before the service started caused problems because the bellringers rang on an open gallery into the church, and the bells are quite quiet inside the tower anyway – I speak as a bellringer, so I understand it from both sides – but if there was any noise playing, if there was any music in church when the ringers were ringing for Sunday morning, the ringers couldn't hear what they were doing. And that meant the music group couldn't really warm up, practice and have those sound checks that were important to be done. So we didn't use the music group as often as we could. Blofield church was also profoundly cold. The average winter temperature between December, January and February was 8.5°, *after* 12 hours heating! It was bitterly cold. So some Sundays you'd be there in February, and at eight o'clock it might just have reached 6°. We could raise it 4° above whatever it was on Saturday morning. So if it was plus 2°, you'd be at 6° Sunday morning. So it was...
5. NW: At some expense, no doubt.
6. A2: At some expense. And so those little bits started to jumble together. There was also the issue of the font, that the way Blofield church had been ordered and re-ordered down the years. Box pews were put in it at one point, and the final two rows of those remained at the west end, but they were on a riser, so they worked a bit like theatre seats. They were very popular, because you could sit at the back and see what was going on at the front. But they had a screen behind them, and that screen had the effect of pushing the font outside the worship area, so you couldn't see it. Thirty odd years before I arrived there'd been discussions about moving the font, because it was recognised that that was the only useful non-pewed area, fenced off from the worshipping area of the church, that could be

used for something. And so these things started to come together, issues of cold, issues of where to put Sunday School, issues over bellringing and music, had started to become a challenge and a problem. The church was also a locked church; it was only open on Sunday afternoon, with bouncers to make sure it was alright. And so that became part of that little tight mix. I think things started by actually opening the church up; that sort of changed the mindset of the village towards the church, and the church towards the village, and it created a very positive sense of 'We've got our church back', and so I became "the kind vicar", rather than the vicar who was out to ruin the parish church. That made a difference in terms of responsibilities, and in terms of understandings of where we were trying to go. So how to deal with the cold, how to deal with lack of children's space, how to deal with music, led us into that redeveloping of the west end. And if we glassed up the tower arch, that would not only keep some of the limited heating in the building, it wouldn't 'go up the chimney, it would also create an upper room where you could have one Sunday School children age downstairs, and another upstairs. And it sort of began on that basis, with perhaps the possibility of a little tiny short gallery stepping out of it, so that ringers could sit. The tower's actually quite small, so if you have visiting ringers there's no space within it, so you could step outside. And it would mean you could teach people to ring, and talk when not ringing, without disturbing the ringers ringing. And that started to create a bit of a gallery effort. We then took it a bit further, thinking if you put a lid over the back of the church, well if you move the font to start with, the font moved into the main worship area, into the north aisle, then people could see the font and people could see baptisms, because if you had a large baptism during a service, and the congregation turned to face the font, no-one would see the font, it was hidden. And so we wanted to bring the baptism within the building, so people could see it from most places within the church, and it was a dead bit of seating, there were no chairs there, and because it was just in front of the organ you couldn't see where the nave communion table was, so you wouldn't sit in that space...

7. NW: That was the proposed location?
8. A2: That was the proposed location, where it would go. And so we started to mull these ideas over. And if we built a gallery that actually covered over that bit where the font was up to the screen, we could create downstairs a large space that could be heated independently, so we could use that in midweek, without the rest of the heating [being] on in the church, but create a valuable space for socialising, for meeting, for all sorts of things. It could be creche space at the back of the church. We also valued the use of the upper deck. OK, you could put a lid on it, but if you can't walk on that lid, it's not functioning. Many years ago I'd gone for an interview at St John's Church in Kings Lynn, and they'd put a lid on the top with useful rooms at the back of the west end, but you couldn't walk on the lid, so it just didn't give you anything you could use, it just made that void upstairs useless. When we have things like the school carol service when the local school would come in, we would get standing room at the back, we would have people

standing in the ringing chamber upstairs to try and get seats and to get into the place. So the gallery we knew would be full, or could be full for those very, very large services, so it wasn't just a put a lid on it, it was a lid that could take weight became the idea. So the font could move out, we could then put a lid on top, we could glass the tower arch up, that would give us creche space underneath, two age groups upstairs and downstairs within the tower, we keep the warmth in, and make baptism far more part of the life of the church. So that was the plan. Do you want me to keep on going?

9. NW: Yes, please do.

10. A2: [Laughs] So I think we put in... Our needs were quite huge; one was to move the font, one was to improve the heating, one was to ... time flies. Yes... lighting was another one, lighting was just nave lights, strip lights on pillars, which produced a very unpleasant thing. And perhaps a second loo, because when we did have schools coming in one loo in church was great, but when you've got 100 children in church, you can bet your bottom dollar more than one child wants the loo at the same time, and sometimes we had huge, huge queues. By using the space where the font was at the back of the church we could then do much, much more for community use and things like that. And a coat of paint wouldn't have gone amiss as well, because like all churches it wasn't very clever. And so we wanted to develop it partly for worship, which is what it's there for in the first place, and the temperature became important. Lighting improves the ambience of the place. We also wished to nurture people, so again having a room which you could not only use for Sunday School but midweek, pastoral work. We have a lovely small hall here [in North Walsham] for about twenty people, so a house group type meeting takes place in there, which is brilliant. I do a midweek bible study and things like that. But also pastoral concern. We can have pastoral ministries offering in that place. And again people from the community can use the building as well, for that particular space. Knowing that things like moving fonts were going to be political, difficult and challenging – if you want to cause a riot in a village, take a pew out – you know if you're moving a font that's been there for 600 years you're kind of asking for trouble. We decided to do an opinion poll, I suppose, for all people who attended Christmas services. So if you came to the Carol Service, or the School Carol Service, or Christingle, or Midnight [Communion], or whatever service they may have been, Advent Carol Service, the lot, we knew there would be church folks in, we also knew there would be a much, much bigger fringe, and some people only coming for the School Carol Service because their child was in it, they wouldn't go to church any other reason at all other than that. And so we asked them about improving the heating, about moving the font, about improving the lighting, about redecorating, about putting a partition in the tower arch with glass in it, about creating a welcome space for church and community events, and creating a gallery for church and community events and use that space upstairs for things like that. And the results were really quite staggering. The most controversial was moving the font, but that had 73% support, support, and only 14% were against, 10 weren't bothered and three didn't answer. The glass panel

across the tower arch: 93% in favour, 3% against, 1% weren't bothered and 4% didn't answer.

11. NW: So very strong support across all of those suggestions...
12. A2: Oh, it was huge. And we also asked people, because we were trying to be a little bit savvy, we asked them to tick whatever age bracket they fell into, and also how close they lived to the church. So we asked them if they were within a couple of miles, within five miles or more than 10 miles radius, and we were not going to listen to the voices of those 10 miles further away in the same way as someone in the village. It seemed to be the fair thing; we didn't want somebody – we'd have listened to that voice – but if a lot of negativity came from people living more than 10 miles away who weren't part of the life of the church or the village, we wouldn't have taken them as seriously as people living in the village. It just seemed a sensible and fair way of doing it. As it was, there was no issue, in fact, but we thought it would cover that one. The most interesting thing was the largest group of respondees were those between 30 and 45, followed by those over 60, and we weren't expecting that, at all. Which said something about those who were more naturally disconnected from the church being very warm towards positive changes within it. And there wasn't a huge conservative 'Oh you can't change our church' bit, which is what we'd expected. So it was incredibly positive, and it did provide very, very good evidence when we came to arguing the case for each different thing. Things never kind of work the way you think they're going to work, and we started some fundraising. And we had an open day in church, which Sue Shillam organised, to try and communicate all the plans, so everybody knew why heating, why the font's going to go, where's it going to go, even the local MP came. So we covered, we touched every single base. It wasn't a consultation in the sense, or even a public meeting, because if you have a public meeting people like to say 'No you can't do it', and once one person starts saying 'No you can't', other folks can buy into that. This was: 'This is what we're going to do: an Open Day in church, all day long. Have a little look. We had a [scale] model built, a model made of the gallery, so you could see and touch. You know, plans are a bit cold and faceless, so we had a model made, so people could think 'OK, I get that, I can see that, I can see what you're trying to do'. We knew the font was going to be the difficult one, because it had been there forever, and to move something, for some people almost felt sacrilegious, because it's always been there.
13. NW: Has it actually always been there, or had it moved?
14. A2: I think it had actually moved three or four inches, because it was standing on top of some of the bricks which were put in 200 years ago. And if you looked at the Victorian seating plan of the church, assuming it was accurate, the font was in the same overall place, but not... It had I suspect been given a new base by the Victorians, and it wasn't quite in the same place that it had been before. But essentially it was still, give or take a foot, it was still in the west end. But we started some fundraising, and things began. We then had flints fall off the church tower.

15. NW: Through the process you've had a couple of architects dealing with this gallery project haven't you?
16. A2: Yes, we started with Terry Norton, who was our existing, at the time but already semi-retired, architect. And Terry very kindly said, 'This could take you years to do. I will get you to first or even second base with it, but you will need to find another architect who can then develop it, because it may take three or four years or whatever, and I might not be alive in three or four years time, and I've got a retirement life to have anyway.' So he got us to that first stage.
17. NW: And the consultation, was that while Terry was still involved?
18. A2: Yes, it was, because the plans we had made of the church, the mock building, the model, was made according to Terry's plans. And we'd taken those to the DAC, and batted them backwards and forwards and had had a number of, as I say, difficult battles with them. The prime one being the DAC hadn't read what I'd put in, and when they responded with a whole load of questions it became very, very clear that the DAC as a body corporate had not had the paperwork we put in, handed out. And they were asking a lot of questions, which were fair questions, but if they'd have looked at our paperwork they'd have found the answers in there. And that made me very unhappy. So I put things back in again in the January with a fully worked out plan with diagrams, annotations, anything you could think of to try and explain what we were trying to do. And they didn't see it. And I was utterly, utterly... I was furious. And I wrote to them, I wrote to the archdeacon, and essentially I put everything back in for the following DAC meeting, and I wrote to them saying 'Here's everything, and I will be in reception downstairs in Diocesan House during your meeting; if you have any questions, please feel free to ask me, but I will not be impressed if you write back saying could you please clarify something, and you didn't come downstairs to ask me'. And I remained in Diocesan Office that morning until I was told they'd dealt with our papers. It may be unfair, but it took me weeks, hours to put the paperwork together, and not to have been read, or to ask silly questions which the answers they could have found was just silly. We won, and things progressed, but I got the impression from the DAC that they never thought we'd ever succeed in doing any of it, so why take it seriously. I think that was a bit of the issue. All we wanted was for them to say 'We've got Terry's plans, we've been to see, we've got it, yes, now please develop it, take it further'. Work was beginning on that line, and I think this was the February, and I have a feeling it would have been the April...
19. NW: Of 2011?
20. A2: ...or '12. Time moves on, doesn't it? Probably, let's say '12, for sake of argument, that we were ready to launch it, in terms of...
21. NW: And by that stage had you appointed your second architect?
22. A2: No... no we hadn't. We wanted the community consultation first bit, so part of our response to the DAC questions 'Have we done..., have we looked at..., have we seen..., have we consulted..., have we done everything else?' Well, yes we have, and this is the evidence. So now give us your blessing, so that we can then move

around and move on. So on the basis of consulting people, we'd had the figures from the survey done before having the Open Day, but it was a way of making sure that we had public support and also so that we could evidence it when going for grants, as well. So that the usual objections were addressed. We had a certain amount of money. And we had this flint fall from the church tower, five flints from half way up the church tower came out onto the path below, and clearly it was moulting. You could clearly see flints were popping out of the flushwork, and we had to deal with it. And I had a meeting with Bishop Alan who came to see me in the church, saying 'What on earth are we going to do? You know we've got to move on the internal stuff, but [we've got] this huge problem outside'. And he said 'Well, how much money have you got?' I think this is right in terms of the order. And we'd had enough already to move the font, and so we... Obviously if you can't move the font you can't create a space underneath, so that had to be the first thing to go. And we wrote and prepared a Statement of Need[s], and recognised the theology of why fonts are by the back of the church by the principal door, and the symbolism of the Christian journey, and I have always taught that in [baptism] preparation, I've always explained it, and I've yet to meet anybody who has understood the symbol without it being explained. I have baptised hundreds of children and if I say 'Why is the font at the back of the church? – if you're going to build a church you wouldn't put it there would you – why is at the back, always at the back, any idea?' 'Take the baby out when the baby is crying?' You know, they've got no idea, so the symbol of the beginning of the journey doesn't speak for itself, it just doesn't speak for itself. And I also know that some of my predecessors had used a portable font in services anyway, to get away from the problem that you can't see the font at the back, which kind of makes that font redundant, and they also knew, because I phoned up all the surviving clergy going back four times before me, and asked them what their baptismal practice was, that when it came to an afternoon baptism families would come in and stand around the font, the baptism would take place, and they'd go again; they never walked past the screen into the body of the church. So it was 'dunk and run', but the baptism theology taking place they never even entered into. And having found that out, and the portable font bit, and everything else. I've always used the real font, and always made the journey from the front to the back, whether it be an afternoon baptism or whether it be during the service, we try to make it such that we're using it properly. I also knew on the DAC is Canon Jeremy Haselock, who is vice-dean of the cathedral, and is a great liturgist, and likes things done properly. And he I suspect would be anti moving the font away from its traditional basis. However, if you go into the cathedral, where they've got a portable font, it moves into the middle of the nave, halfway up the nave in the Easter season, when baptism vows are renewed and the confirmations take place; but once you're outside of that season, is the font by the principal entrance? No! Is it at the back of church? No! It's parked outside a door marked 'No Entry'. And so I deliberately and maybe unfairly, said 'Non-verbal communication is important'. This is the argument I used for moving it: it's in full

view of the congregation, baptism even in an afternoon service is never private at the back of the church but takes place within the heart of the building. Belonging is an important symbol. The position does involve a journey to the font from the east end of the nave, the font has an exalted place where baptism is taken seriously rather than dumped at the back of an aisle. That was the argument: Jeremy wanted it at the back of the north aisle, near the entrance, but it would just have been obscured. So I tried to tackle that head on, and 'know your enemy' perhaps is the way to go. And it communicates congregation, togetherness and inclusivity; our baptism is held before us, and the place where it's planned to go – and now is – has been known as the 'Children's Corner', as the wooden screen has a painting of Jesus blessing the children as its focal point. The floor is ready to take the font, the space isn't good for congregational seating as it gives no view of the pulpit or the nave holy table. And a future lighting scheme would improve the area. Non-verbal communication is important. As you enter the cathedral via the Hostery, you pass the till and then the shop as you enter the nave. The font is not by the principal entrance, indeed it stands by a closed door marked 'No Entrance'. We hope the font at the head of the north aisle communicates importance, belonging, blessing, which is the starting point for most parents requesting baptism. It is interesting to note that the Common Worship Initiation book makes no reference to fonts at the back of church, other than regarding old fonts as redundant in many churches. It makes nothing of the traditional place of baptism being a symbol to be cherished, it assumes a practice of portable fonts. It's our desire for our font to work for us, and not be redundant or fossilised.

23. NW: Very good.
24. A2: So that was my theological and ecclesiastical argument for moving it, and they said yes.
25. NW: So you were able to move the font which would have been necessary as part of the gallery scheme anyway.
26. A2: Absolutely. The font had to move.
27. NW: And that has successfully opened up the back of the space for...
28. A2: Have you yet been into Blofield church?
29. NW: Yes.
30. A2: You have. So you'll appreciate that space at the back of church is huge. The next thing we did, because we had this whole problem... The PCC kind of got the big picture, but had a tendency to be in a... 'It's OK doing stuff for the children, but what about us' bit. 'We're freezing cold', and so they were really quite keen to advance the heating bit. We'd already gone to the plans from JBKS... No I think you're right, in terms of timings. The consultation bit, we did have JBKS's plans, I'm sure we did, I'm sure we got to that point. We had their rather grand, beautiful gallery scheme, which looked stunning, I'm sure we had that at that stage, I'm sure we did. Then we had the problem of the fall. We started work on the heating scheme, and we raised the money in a year – £55,000 – and we paid our [parish] share in full, and we got no grants.

31. NW: So giving within the church?

32. A2: Yep, yep, yep. A large dollop came from one source, but that didn't matter, it was there. And the heating system we put in, again it's a wet radiator system, but it kept the building... the building never got colder than 11 degrees, so it would just keep firing up, little and often. And it meant that our Sunday worshipping temperature... Well actually every time the church was in use it was always 18 degrees. It never got colder than 10 or 11. And the transformation, when you've had winters of struggling to get up to 8 [degrees], to be in 18. And the difference it made was terrific. Our Christingles used to be freezing cold. And a reasonable number, I was always disappointed with the numbers, I think we first came, Christingle, 120 maybe on an afternoon of Advent 3, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, it wasn't even dark, it just didn't really work. And we ended up moving it to Christmas Eve, and I think the first time we did it we'd gone from 150 to 250, just because the heating was on and people came. My last year there were, I think it's, 315; no I couldn't tell you, it's 300 and a lot. The church sat 250, and there were people right at the back, in the tower, on the carpet in the chancel, in the choir stalls, everywhere, because the heating was working. And this is the point when the gallery sort of gets forgotten about, because part of enclosing the space was to have a space you could heat independently, and we'd found this heating system actually did a pretty good job of heating the whole church. Going back in time, when we first moved to Blofield, midweek services took place in our house, because it was too cold to heat the church up for 15, 16 people at a midweek service. And they loved coming to our house. We didn't always value it having young children, and when it came to summer holidays and school holidays we encouraged them to take the service back into church, and that was the deal, and they understood that it wasn't too cold in the summer anyway. And we began to take over the chancel, which had never been used for worship at all. It was the place they stored florists' junk; it was just incredible, they never used it. They would go and receive up at the sanctuary rail [on] Easter Day, and that was the only time on which we went up there, always the nave table, always other than Easter Day; celebrate [communion] in the middle, so actually having the midweek service in the chancel felt kind of special once we'd got rid of the junk, and we tried to keep it there as long as we could. Once we got to about June we moved back in there and see if we could survive into September, before we came back into our house. In our house, groups would always make tea and coffee and refreshments, and it was all very nice and very easy to do. And we started to do that in church once we moved back. And a couple really took this on, and were quite keen... There had been talk a long long time ago about doing some kind of drop in bit, and so the after church coffee on the Wednesday morning then became coffee for everyone in the village wanting it. And as Sue's probably told you...

33. NW: That's Poppies Café.

34. A2: ...Poppies Café has gone from maybe 15, 16, 18, 20 folk staying for coffee after a service to up to 70 people at times coming in for coffee from the village. And it's



taken on a complete life of its own, and sometimes has expanded beyond the space we were thinking of sealing off, and it's expanded down into the nave and things like that. And they've become so used to using that space, to put a lid on top of it now, somehow, they've got used to sitting and looking at the wide open space and to enclose them, you just sense there was that... 'Well we rather like it like this'. That's the difficulty, that's the downside of it: it stopped the putting a lid on top. We also started a toddler group in church that same day, because again, that's when the heating was on, because you could do it, because the heating was there. So other things opened up, things we didn't expect.

35. NW: Just by virtue of the heating...
36. A2: By virtue of the heating.
37. NW: ...and the space at the back.
38. A2: Yep, indeed, which could never have happened. There were unfinished jobs. The tower arch is still not blocked in, there's still no gallery, and we still struggle for space for children, for Sundays; those are still needing to be addressed.
39. NW: So if you were still incumbent, do I read you right, that you wouldn't be pursuing the gallery any more?
40. A2: I think I'd come to a point when I'd come back to a short gallery, which would have been... I'd have liked to have blocked up the tower arch, again partly because even in winter with a good heating system there's a draught that comes down onto those sitting at Poppies. So it would be more efficient for the heating system.
41. NW: And this is blocking in but [with] glazing?
42. A2: Glazing, glazing it. But there's nothing worse as a bellringer than ringing in what essentially is a greenhouse. It is just... The sun comes round at the end of the day, it's practice night, it's a Thursday night, the sun streaming in through a glass window, you've got a glass window behind you, it just bakes. And so you'd want to have doors within the blocked up window, leading out onto something, so you could open it up and let hot air dissipate into the church, and people to sit out on it, and also the ability when you have those big services, if you had it just sealed in completely, you'd lose that extra seating – you could still see, but you wouldn't hear what was going on. So it needed to have those doors to be open wide. The gallery needn't go out that far, three or four feet, maybe six feet, and there's evidence that there was a gallery going out that far; there's graffiti on the wall, and there's a ledge extending where you can imagine something sitting. So it's got precedent. But it would only go, maybe as far as this half of the room.
43. NW: Seven foot or so.
44. A2: Seven foot or so. That would be far enough to be able to open some double doors out and then sit some people on like a musician's gallery, I suppose. I think there's plenty of scope for that to happen, and it still gives you then the upstairs room and the downstairs room.
45. NW: In the tower.

46. A2: In the tower. And I think that would be... it doesn't give you the whole gallery complex, but I suspect now that Poppies has taken on a life of its own, which is great, the argument for sealing it in is not as strong just by virtue of what it's done. Yeah.
47. NW: Do you regret the passing of that part of the scheme?
48. A2: I wish I could have seen that bit happen, I suppose. On a personal note I also found I was getting very, very, very locked in to a huge amount of building stuff. Sue was absolutely brilliant, but there was no secretarial help, and you do become... Sue was very much the leading person, without whom we would have been absolutely stuck. But it still needed a lot of incumbent's time to push it, sell it, jump on the DAC, and rattle bars, and I think, towards the end. Almost every week, once or twice a week, I was having building meetings week after week, year after year after year, and that did make it...
49. NW: It takes a lot of energy and time.
50. A2: It does, a huge amount. And then the Hemblington project then started as well, and the battles that went on with that one, from the DAC forgetting what they'd been and seen and done. If I have regrets, they would be the ones, the tower wasn't sealed in, because that would allow music, organists to rehearse and all sorts of things, it would have given that option, and the extra space upstairs, should we want to use it. That I think is the one bit I think we probably needed to have done. I suspect also though now the bellringers aren't ringing as often as they were, because the bellringers were a group of very, very close friends, all of an age, who had been ringing there for years and years and years and years. And they really didn't want to teach anyone to ring. And they've all suddenly magically in the last 18 months all hit upon serious health issues. And that wonderful band of very faithful ringers – and church members, all of them were members of the congregation – they weren't ringers who rang and ran off; [they were] members of our congregation. But because they'd been so self-sufficient for so long they didn't have the patience to teach and didn't want to teach. I mean they did have a girl express an interest and they did all they could to put her off. And when my boys were learning to ring, elsewhere because they couldn't make practice because it clashed with Scouts, we took them elsewhere, they were never invited up, even when they were short. You know, we want to do posh stuff, rather than boring stuff. And so they've almost led to their own demise, with their inability to teach. So if the music group does play on a Sunday morning there may not be any ringers to put off. But that's a sadness, and it should never have been that way. But they didn't want to teach. And they've had years of doing it, and you can't... they knew they had to teach, but they never did.
51. NW: You mentioned your role in the building project as incumbent. Tell me a little bit more about that; it looks like a pivotal role, certainly in the case of this project.
52. A2: I think it is. I think Blofield certainly had been talking about font moving for 30 years, they'd been moaning about the heating system since the '70s, but had done nothing about it. It was just too big: 'Too big, can't be done'. All those bits,

and I think there is a time when leadership becomes important, and I have had experience of reordering projects when I was incumbent in Yorkshire as well, and so you come with a sense of knowing what can be done.

53. NW: That change is possible, is that what you represent partly?

54. A2: That change is possible, change brings renewal, change brings new life, and change brings people together, if it's done the right way. If you're happy with mediocrity, and buildings covered with green slime, I don't think it's a place of worship. It's meant to say something about the goodness of God, is it not? [Laughs] A place of fellowship and nurture and teaching, and if it's skanky and manky it just tells a horrible story, and the Gospel's got to be a good news story, hasn't it? I think I've got in here... [looks for paperwork] Somewhere I've got before and afters of photographs of the churches in Yorkshire, which were all transformed.

55. NW: Which churches were you involved with?

56. A2: I was at Elloughton and Brough with Brantingham, near Hull, East Yorkshire, just up on the Humber, and we had a daughter church, 1912 building, red brick, no tower, proper churchy windows in it, looked more chapel than church, but it was there. It was the workers' church and the servants' church in the old days. Because the parish church was posh, and this was down the hill. The aircraft factory, BAE are there now, but Hawker Sidley had their factories down the bottom, and it had seats, chairs nailed together in rows of six, and things like that. People donated their old carpets from the '70s, and there were patches of hideous '70s carpets in places in the church. The flooring was wood, but at some point someone had painted the floor black where the choir stalls began, separated, a dark line between nave... you know, people and choir, somehow. And it was just tatty. You walked in, and it just felt – the paintwork was fine – but it just felt – you were kind of embarrassed to invite people in somehow. It just had that feel. The parish church had burnt down in the '60s, and they had done a really good [job of] refurbishing it in the '60s, they'd done a great job, a barrel-vaulted ceiling rather than a huge pitch pine cobweb factory, it was just really nice. But it had a damp problem, and we had bits of salting on the walls where the paint had peeled off and blistered. There was a tide mark where I was led to believe there had been a wedding, and the bride's father was a painter and decorator, so he painted as far as he could reach all round, so there was this tide mark, he hadn't gone any further. So [they still had] the original carpets from after the fire, so the carpets were 40 years old, and everything was incredibly tired. And then there was the village church which when I first walked into it was like a Hammer Horror film really: the amount of cobwebs coming down from the ceiling, I'd never seen anything like it before, it was white in places with cobweb, and there was bat poo down the walls, there were holes in the carpet, and there was a tidemark, someone had washed the walls down, someone's daughter had done it in the school holidays, but she could only reach about that high, so you could see this line. It had heating that worked, but oh gosh it was scruffy, there's no other

way to describe it. And they became exciting journeys. The village church congregation, we started with 18, [Hymns] Ancient and Modern Revised with tape holding the spines together, Prayer Book only, nothing by Prayer Book. I was asked the question at interview, 'You won't change anything, vicar, will you?' That was the [?] question. But that place became a place of complete transformation. I had no vision for the village church, other than this Prayer Book service is going to die, and we do something better. And how wrong. They'd repainted the porch the weekend before I started; it was full of flakey paint everywhere, and they just did it. And that was an instant transformation as you walked in. It was very odd, it was very odd. I'm trying to think of the order of things. God seemed to be doing something, the numbers just grew, and I think by six months in, there was a key wedding coming up, and they had the church redecorated, someone gave the money to have the church redecorated. And all of a sudden it went clean. And then they started polishing the brass, because the brass hadn't been touched for years, you know that sort of dull... everything had 'dull' about it. And all of a sudden you saw what you should start to see; you didn't see the lump of plaster off the wall, or the skanky bits. You saw the communion table, the cross, you saw the font and you saw what you should see, the stained glass windows. And the congregation continued to grow. We had to buy some collection plates because the collection bags weren't big enough, and the congregation went to 25. Then somebody said to the treasurer, 'We'd like to put a new carpet in; can the PCC choose one?' And we came up with two possibilities in a similar kind of colour, and we said 'We'd better go for the cheaper one' and the treasurer said, 'No, the donor wants you to go for the expensive one'. So that went in. Then the vestries are paid for and re-kitted out. Then money for a sound system came from nowhere. We had 60 folks I think on Christmas Day, and we couldn't cope with one chalice, so someone gave another chalice. And it went on like that. And when I left we were up to 40, regularly coming to this Prayer Book congregation at quarter past nine; that's not normal. And in my last week, there was a couple who said a year or so beforehand 'We really must do something about having a toilet in this place'. There'd been a big funeral, and there was nowhere to go, there's no running water on site, the church was just outside the village, and to top up the heating tank you had to go to the treasurer's house next door and carry buckets across the churchyard, climb a ladder to pour it in. [Laughs] It was just that kind of primitive. And they said 'We must do something, we'll get things started, but can you find out what it would cost?' And time went on, our time comes to an end, we're about to move to Blofield, and I thought I haven't actually asked this couple, we need to find out what this project might cost to put a loo in. And also I need to get back to the couple to say 'How much were you thinking of contributing to get things moving?' We had a DAC meeting with the PCC in our last week there, and the DAC said 'There's no way you'll put a loo inside this church. The tower space is not big enough, it's two steps up into the chancel where you could put a loo but you can't access the loo from there, so it's got to be an extension.' And it's a stone building, so you're looking at – and there's no water on site – about

£125,000. So I went back to the couple and said 'Help, it's a lot of money, you didn't say how much you were thinking of contributing towards it.' 'All of it' they said. And two years after I left I was invited back to flush the loo, there's a kitchen at the back of church, there's two loos, there's an internal loo, and there's one you can get to by going round the back of the church for level access. That congregation now sometimes is 70 on a Sunday morning. They've cornered the wedding market in the benefice, they run Alpha Courses, and they've got a church plant in the church hall once a month, in the village hall rather, in the middle of the village, and it's a Prayer Book congregation; that's just not normal. And it's an absolute blessing, and seeing that church, in one sense its fabric changing, but seeing the faith of that community grow. And in one sense we didn't change anything. You know we changed the hymnbooks. I can remember about six months in saying 'Do you mind if we change the hymnbooks?' and they said 'Can we?', which is not what I thought they would say. I thought they were going to say 'We're going to shoot you if you do'. And I said to them, 'OK...' – I wasn't expecting them to say 'Yes' – '... how many shall we get? About 30 do you think?' 'Oh no' said the churchwarden, 'get 80.' There was a real sense of positivity and wanting people to come. You don't order 80 hymnbooks – because if you have a funeral people have service sheets, if you have a wedding you have service sheets – you only order that number of hymnbooks if you're going to use them. And that sense of forward looking...

57. NW: So it was a community that had become much more open to...

58. A2: I think they always were open. I think they had gone to that point when they [say] 'We're Prayer Book, no-one likes Prayer Book, clergy really don't like Prayer Book, clergy are out to get us if we're Prayer Book'. And once you can learn to work with, and value what they value, I think a sense of trust comes. And it was just a lovely, lovely time. It was just incredible. The other two churches were a different story entirely, the daughter church and the parish church. We had all these problems, but I discovered they had £45,000 of money in shares which they'd forgotten about. No, no, no, no, no, it was £78,000, it was £78,000 [laughs]. That's it, it was £78,000. They were given a legacy 30 years beforehand of about £30,000, and stuck it in shares and forgotten about it. It had always appeared on the annual accounts, you know, 'Shares the value of...' but it had never appeared because it wasn't in the general fund, it wasn't in the fabric fund, it was just there and no-one seemed to pick it up that there was this money sitting in shares. You also had the curate's house, which was a tip, and unfit for anything, and that was sold and we owned half of that, and we probably made £40,000 out of our bit of it, because it was in just a dreadful state. So we ended up having over £100,000. I remember having a PCC; we were in the daughter church, and I said to them, because we had one PCC for the two churches, the daughter church only had one person on the PCC, such was the power balance between the two. But we still met alternate PCC meetings would meet at All Saints' Church, the daughter church, one meeting, and the church halls of the parish church the other. And we were in the daughter church, and I said to them 'How much money

do you think we've got in our fabric fund?' And they said '£7,000', and you know the whole bit, 'More, more, more' and someone said '£50,000', and I said 'No, no, more'. And people look at me, like you're winding us up, this is not true, you could just see people's faces just doing all of that. I said. 'It's actually £78,000 that we've got', and I said where it was, and the room kind of went quiet. And I said to them, 'Are you comfortable on these chairs?' And they said 'No'. 'Can I get some chairs in for our next meeting, so we can try them out, because these are horrible.' Whereas somebody else said, 'Well, if you're going to do the chairs, for goodness sake can we deal with the floor as well?' And all of a sudden – the money was given – I went to the original will – it was for the parish church and its charitable needs, and I checked with the legal people in the diocese – that was it, it was 'charitable purposes' – and the daughter church and the church halls were in effect the charitable purposes of the mother church. And so when the money came in as well from the curate's house sale, with that £100,000 we cleaned and tidied the floor, stripped it and sealed it, and bought in new chairs, sold the old ones off, put a sound system in and changed the lights. We put a new floor in one of the church halls and in the parish church we took off all the plaster and put in some electrodes in it to try and drive the damp down – I'm not sure it would have worked efficiently – but that was the idea to repel moisture getting up by putting a mild current, probes went in every six inches all round the church. So that's what they did, and that became... it was replastered, it was repainted in its entirety, new carpet, new sound system, new lighting scheme which was dimmable, adjustable, computer programmable, and all those wonderful things, and the effect on the congregation was vast. When I first went to the church you were lucky to get a Rich Tea biscuit, and one only, one only, because they were counted out, after a Sunday service.

59. NW: It speaks volumes about the understanding of the generosity of God.
60. A2: Exactly. And the biggest change when we came back into the parish church – nothing was ever said – but every single Sunday that followed our return, it was always an assortment box of biscuits including chocolate, and they were never counted. There was something about the sense the building had become damp, uncared for, and it *did* affect the congregation, who also came across as damp [laughs] somehow, and nothing was ever going to change. And that sense of renewal of the building brought a real sense of renewal and hospitality. It was just amazing.
61. NW: So an interesting relationship between the building and the people, I think.
62. A2: The saying that people start looking like their dogs, I think happens in church buildings. If the church building isn't a good news story, if the building speaks of decline, decay, and nothing happens here, then I am sure it affects people's faith. If we believe in a transforming gospel, of the life of the Spirit and resurrection power, and our buildings speak of death and hopelessness, then what we see all around us subliminally will take away from that gospel message of hope and life. And so, for want of a coat of paint, I think the amount of transformation... You

know, for me when I walk into a building, the first thing is what does it look like? Is it dirty, is it clean, is it damp, are the flowers dead or alive? You know, what I see is does this church speak of goodness. I don't mind some Romantic tiredness, because we can't all afford coats of paint, but there's a difference between Romantically tired and quite charming, between decay and uncared-for-ness – there's a big difference. I think for me it makes a huge difference.

63. NW: So just following the theme of hope, and hope I think necessarily implying change...
64. A2: Yep.
65. NW: ...I think...
66. A2: Yep, yep.
67. NW: ...you see the buildings as hopeful?
68. A2: Yep.
69. NW: Is that fair to say?
70. A2: Yep. I think that they are tools in mission, ministry, evangelism.
71. NW: And then the process of changing a building, how hopeful is that, how easy is that?
72. A2: I think... I'm a lover of history, and therefore my argument always has been... I am trying to rewrite a history of St Nicholas' here, I called it 'a history' because no-one knows what the history is, it has to be a history, an interpretation. But my opening gambit whenever I've tried to write these things has always been 'What you see today is not what you would have seen yesterday.' The biggest cultural problem we have in all of our churches is this belief by not only church folk but the parishes, that it has never changed. And it has always been like it, so to change it is to damage what has always been the case. So my approach is always, always to try and show people either through pointing out through a guidebook or whatever else, actually it's constantly evolved. Church buildings change when they have no money, and they can't afford to repair stuff, or they've got lots when they can afford to make changes, and they change for theological purposes and understandings, whether it be the Reformation or whatever else. But theology and money and a bit of the social make-up of a place have always led to church fabric changing.
73. NW: So change is in the nature of a church.
74. A2: It is, absolutely. And I think... I always wanted to do a spot the difference; I did do a spot the difference at Blofield. There's an 1866 painting, and today, and as you go 'Spot the difference'. And if you took Ladbrooke's painting of Blofield, for example, you can just spot the difference from that. There's a window there now, straight off. There's a cross on there, the roof pitch is higher as well, there's a cross on there, the windows are different windows, those are open now, and you could go on and on. There are about... Those gravestones don't exist. You can go on and on and on, from roof levels to window style to... the whole lot is different. But people somehow believe it's always, always, always been the same. And if

you're making the argument of why you want to change something then I think you have to go back... You know Blofield kitchen, which they're trying to do, and [to] take up the floor at the back of church – you'll be familiar with that – but reading the churchwarden's accounts you discover that a couple of thousand bricks were bought in red and white in about 1820. Where did those bricks go? I reckon it's the floor. I can't think of anything else for which you'd use red and white bricks, and red and white bricks you can see are on the floor, so for me, that ties in with the arrival of the box pews as well, so a huge church reorganisation in the 1820s. To take those bricks up, part of the argument is they're not that old, they're not the original floor. So once you've ascertained it's not the original floor then the conservation preservation brigade can't say 'They're medieval floor things, they've been there for years and years and years'. So I think you have to know your history, and you have to know so that when you make your argument... It's like the font at Blofield, if you know one of your chief objectors *could* be Jeremy Haselock at the Cathedral, then you want to make sure your argument is one that, if he tries to justify why it's got to be like that, he's got to ask himself 'Why isn't my font where it should be as well?' So I think you have to be a little bit naughty, but you have to know why you're doing it. I think that's the key bit.

75. NW: And what you've termed 'the conservation brigade'...

76. A2: Yep.

77. NW: ...do you think, in your experience do they take the argument? Are they partners in a conversation, or...?

78. A2: They are, I think in one sense they are a one-dimensional argument. I'm all in favour of having site meetings with all interested peoples at the very earliest stages so that you know what they are saying, so you've heard their bit of the conversation, and so when you...

79. NW: And is that what happened at Blofield, did you have that?

80. A2: To some extent. I met with David Eve very, very early on from English Heritage, before anything took place, and pointed out key bits to him. And what kind of things can we do in this space? So we'd already in one sense covered the basic ground things with him, about can we put the gallery up here, what are the arguments against, and what are the issues. I think it's really important to listen to those. And then you have to sit back and when they start to say 'No you can't do [that]', you listen to the objections, which I think is really important. What are they objecting to? Is it that the objection is that it's simply a change, and they can't cope with a change? Is it because this thing that you wanted to get rid of has actually got a huge amount of value to it, and its destruction is unforgivable? You have to listen to that. I think you still have to make a judgement call, as to if you still think that's a case, you know. One of the sad things at St Nicholas' is that they had a decluttering programme in the 80s when all sorts of things went, an eagle lectern has gone. And I'm very thankful for the decluttering that took place, but it was always very heavy-handed, and a little bit 'Don't tell anybody else we're



doing it'. How much had faculties I don't know. And there are some things, the eagle lectern actually, I wish we still had. We have a large cellar, here...

81. NW: In this house?

82. A2: No, no. Under a car park in North Walsham. It's concreted up, but we could unconcrete it, and we were only talking the other day, we've got four pews which are the four oldest pews in church, which are just stacked in the way, and serve no overall purpose; if we could put them in the cellar, we're not throwing them away. And so the eagle lectern, had we still got it, could have gone in the cellar. It's dry, nothing's going to get to them. We're not throwing them away, we're not burning them, or getting rid of them or selling them. If we ever wanted to bring them back out again then we've still got them. I don't like throwing things away, because once you've chucked them they're gone.

83. NW: You mentioned history; are you a historian by training?

84. A2: My degree's in Biblical Studies, but I did History to A Level, and there's a few history type books in this room, to be fair. So yeah, I do read on History, especially Church History, just to get to know the nuances, yeah. So that's why I don't like the current church guide; it's just wrong, it just doesn't do justice to the history. So yeah, I guess, not by training but...

85. NW: By temperament?

86. A2: By temperament. Absolutely. Understanding history, where you come from, helps you then to move forwards. And in order to respect the past you have to know what function something played in the past. A classic example here at St Nicholas'. 25 years ago we had a very Anglo-Catholic vicar here – it wasn't the tradition of St Nicholas' at all – and the last guidebook has been re-written by him, and we've got a 1548 communion table...

87. NW: Interesting.

88. A2: Second Prayer Book. He insists on calling it an altar. If you know your Church History, it's anything but. Yep, it's completely wrong; it never ever, ever, ever, ever was meant to be an altar. The whole point of it is that it is a table. So there are bits like which aggravate, in terms of the history, it's just wrong. And then you discover every church bible [including] the last one always calls it a communion table, so his bit of theology gets written into things. But the main communion table in the sanctuary was carved by a 16 year old in the 1850s, and it was meant to be seen, it's not meant to be covered. But it's got birds on it, it's got grain, it's got grape, it's got blackberries on it, it's just incredible. And again, reading through the archives it was only covered in the Second World War, after the War they wanted to beautify the sanctuary as a sign of doing something after the War to commemorate the dead who died. Smartening it up or whatever it was part of their thinking. But you only cover it up on the assumption that it was uncovered beforehand. And so I'm wanting to take the covers off again in September and October for Harvest time, and also for the guidebook, and as I said at PCC on Monday night it was made to be seen, and it only got covered up in the Second World War, and the archivist who is very much of the high tradition himself was

there with me when we found this passage. So he knows that I know, and I know that he knows it was previously exposed as a table, so we're going to put it back to table in September. So history tells you things.

89. NW: Reflecting on the conversation, do you think we could say that the attempt to 'respect' history by stopping change is in fact to do it an injustice?
90. A2: Oh totally, Yeah.
91. NW: Because, built into the history of a building or of a community or of a person is inevitably change if that history/building/community is open and alive.
92. A2: I think it's inevitable. The classic example... [reaching down a picture from the wall] This is St Nicholas', OK. What period would you put that window in? Actually those windows; what period would you put them in?
93. NW: Well, they are in a medieval style...
94. A2: Yeah.
95. NW: ...and I'm guessing they've come along a lot later.
96. A2: We don't actually know, is the answer.
97. NW: OK [laughs]
98. A2: That's 1810...
99. NW: The east window.
100. A2: These we don't know. And one of the arguments is that, when St Nicholas' was being built it was started in the 1330s and finally finished in 1405, that the Black Death meant we had boring windows, because there were no skilled craftsmen. I can't think of any other church in Norfolk with boring windows from that period in time, so it doesn't make sense to me. I have also found in the Record Office an inscription from the early 1820s describing the mullions in the north and south aisle windows being modern. Doesn't tell me anything other than that it's new stonework. Is it new stonework matching what was there before, or is it new stonework of a sort of Georgian-Gothic that was in vogue. I don't know the answer. [Leaves room briefly] I think I could make a case for St Nicholas' windows that the clergy at the time... There's a monument here to a Nonconformist minister who was clearly best mates with the vicar in the 1760s, and it speaks very highly of him. And so they clearly shared I suspect a deep respect for one another's ministries, if nothing else. I think St Nicholas' was generally of a fairly low tradition historically in time, and that those windows may have come from that time when the church was being 'Georgified' inside. And why not put Georgian Gothic windows in at the same time? As an example of building change. I can't prove it yet, but for me, this is the second largest parish church building in Norfolk, under the care of St Benet's Abbey, a very wealthy abbey, why has it got boring windows? I'm sure they're not original. I can't prove it, but it tells a story for me, if they're not the original, of change of design and style, so yeah it has moved, it's moved.
101. NW: Thank you. I think we're probably getting towards the end of our time.
102. A2: We could go on forever [laughs]

103. NW: Just one more question really, reflecting on your experience of changing church buildings, is there one thing that you would like to see different, fixed?
104. A2: In terms of...?
105. NW: The process.
106. A2: ... the process. I'm not sure, I don't know how you improve the process. I think I was getting to a point with the previous DAC before Matthew [McDade] came on board of wanting to try and do the opt-out route, in the same way that you can get Scottish Water from here, and I can get Southern Power, why can't I go to Bristol DAC for a faculty, who are far more open-minded than Norwich?
107. NW: Radical!
108. A2: Well, absolutely. And as part of an interest in reordering, I used to subscribe to *Church Buildings*, the architectural magazine, and also when looking at other building reorderings I have been in contact with different DACs and other churches where they've done something similar to what we hoped to do at Blofield. So that I was aware of what was being allowed in other parts of the country as well. And so if you can do it in Suffolk, if you can do it in Bristol, if you can do it in Yorkshire, why can't we do it in Norfolk? And I was getting really frustrated with them at times. There was an example of ... it was Hemblington, which you can read at your leisure, that ... I haven't got their response, because I left that response behind at Blofield, but they listed a whole load of different things why we couldn't do what we wanted to do and...
109. NW: This is the DAC?
110. A2: This is the DAC. And I just couldn't understand what they said, so this was November '12. We met in 2008 and they said we couldn't put a log cabin on site. You came in March and said the log cabins wouldn't work. We invited you again in 2011 about a toilet and a kitchen, and you said 'Yeah, that can do'; I even quoted what they said. And they came and said this, this, this, this, this, 'It's all OK'. So we put in for a faculty and they come in and say 'Why can't you put a log cabin in the churchyard?... and it would destroy the wall painting on the wall.' Why would an extension... It was just completely bonkers. Why did you say 'Yes' when they came a year before and now you're saying 'No'. It was a whole list of things. And having kept all the correspondence, and knew exactly what I had sent them and everything else it was... I was spitting mad, again, because they said 'Yes, we could do' and a year later we'd got the architect's papers together, so there you come. And it's now been built, as Sue will probably tell you.
111. NW: Yes.
112. A2: But it was just incredible. And I think Matthew [McDade] will make a big difference here, but in terms of the process when you've got a DAC who may have had self-appointed people on; Matthew invited me to go on the DAC, early on, I would love to, but how long would my appointment last? Could I be there in 20 years time, still? And there doesn't seem to be a way of getting people off, if that makes any sense. And if you get people who are there who may understand things architecturally but perhaps have no faith, aren't worshipping regularly, they don't

see it from that theological/practical bit. There are also some pretty hideous reorderings in this diocese, which obviously had gone through DAC and passed everything else, and you think 'Yuck, what have they done?' You know, there are some of those. Watton I think is awful, and you think how did that get through? And so there are massive inconsistencies and sometimes you can tell that a committee has had its paw in it, because whatever they've ended up with doesn't really work in a sensible safe way. Upper Sherringham has got the most strangest of kitchens; the only way you can get out of it is to walk into the main thoroughfare, but there's no window in the door, so you open this door onto people perhaps walking past, there's no hatch, there's no rear view mirror, so if you're going to walk out with a tray of hot drinks, open the door, who is going to back into it and knock it all over you? It just doesn't bear thinking about. The DAC didn't seem to work through... they've got something at the back of church that you can't really notice, it ticks that bit, it's virtually incognito, but does it really deliver? And those are the bits that worry me.

113. NW: So not enough practical/theological...

114. A2: Yes, I think, sometimes there are some church communities that are in danger of thinking we have to become another village hall, because actually church life is so fragile, and we can survive that way, rather than being re-energised as Christians...

115. NW: To be Church.

116. A2: To be Church. That's exactly what I think. That bit sometimes gets lost and we lose sight of actually what our main purpose is to worship [God] and serve our neighbour, and love our... You know those bits – rather than providing another hall space that keeps us going for a bit longer. The underlying message is that we're on the way out.

117. NW: The management of decline.

118. A2: I want to kick against that.

119. NW: So it's principally a theological, missional, ministerial argument rather than a building argument.

120. A2: Yeah, for me, absolutely. An example: we have a wedding at Edenthorpe coming up soon, and I'm only there once a month because the services are at the same time as St Nicholas', and they have two services a month, and if I was twice there I would be twice here, and my priority is more being here. But I became very aware of this luminous green hue all over the font. The more I noticed it the more it really starts to bug you. So I washed it down, and tried to get as much green slime as possible [off], just with soap, mild detergent, nothing nasty or whatever to dissolve anything. It gave me some satisfaction; whether anyone will note I don't really know, but the horrible almost black green slime that was on it, rising, and all over it, has gone. And we are having a work party up there on Tuesday to give it a real good clean. but for me, the green slime on the floor is not a Good News story, but to get rid of it, and to work with the congregation in tidying it up, being on my hands and knees as well, we're doing this together. And that's important. We

have got that power, and we have got that control, we can clean, and we beautify, and we can reach up high and we can make sure the glass is clean, if we can clean it, and things like that. And sometimes it is that sense of the clergy taking the congregation seriously. That's an important bit; if the congregation thinks the vicar's out to get them or close them down, which many do, many believe the clergy are down to close them, and many clergy tell me I should do my successor a favour by closing this down, and you're thinking 'But why?'. Because you can't make it work, or you haven't made it work, or you haven't really bothered with them? And that's before you get to any DACs or reorderings, there has to be a sense of 'Do I, as an incumbent, value this congregation? Do I believe in a God of resurrection and life, and how does that inspire my ministry in this place? And if it's not being a Good News ministry, if my ministry is just going in, reading the Prayer Book, and some half scribbled sermon on the back of an envelope and coming away again, if that's the best I can do, am I helping?

121. NW: Thank you A2, we're going to leave it there.