St Nicholas, Skirbeck is a parish within the Diocese of Lincoln and is under the pastoral and sacramental care of The Right Reverend Norman Banks SSC, Bishop of Richborough. It is a Parish of The Society and is affiliated with Forward in Faith. It serves the population of a residential area of the market town of Boston as well as ministering to those in the wider area who value its traditional Catholic teaching, worship and Spirituality. It sees this distinctive ethos as a gift to the service of the mission of the Church throughout the area.

Following the decision of General Synod that women should be ordained to the Priesthood, the Parochial Church Council passed the resolutions contained within the Priests (Ordination of Women) Measure together with that contained within the Episcopal Ministry Act of Synod 1993. The decision was subsequently taken to petition for the continued oversight of the Bishop of Richborough in accordance with The House of Bishops Declaration on the Ministry of Bishops and Priests. This resolution has recently been reaffirmed unanimously by the Parochial Church Council.

We seek a Priest of The Society of St Wilfred & St Hilda and preferably also of The Society of the Holy Cross. Also someone –

- Whose ministry is grounded in the celebration of Sacraments, particularly the daily Mass.
- Who is forward thinking and willing to try new ventures.
- Who is approachable and honest; willing to listen; has integrity and a sense of humour but is also tactful.
- Who will continue the close associations with the schools in the Parish.
- Who has a desire to develop members of the congregation in their discipleship by supporting both their increase in knowledge of the Faith and the deepening of their spiritual lives.
- Who has a sense of musicality to fully engage in the Sung Mass.
- Who wishes to work with the congregation to identify the evolving needs of the local community, reaching out to address these in compassion.
- Who is willing to maintain a connection with other churches in the Deanery to keep unity in the Church of England. Be willing to participate fully in the life of the Deanery Chapter both in Chapter meetings and in giving and receiving support with colleagues in the Deanery as circumstances demand.
- Who wants to reach out to people of all ages and backgrounds, seeking to bring them into relationship with Jesus, the Word made flesh.
Thank you for taking time to look at this particular post within the Diocese of Lincoln, As one of the largest diocese in the country stretching from the Humber estuary in the North to the Wash in the South we are home to a population of just over 1,000,000 people living a variety of different settings from the urban centres of Grimsby and Cleethorpes and Scunthorpe, the City of Lincoln, the market towns, the coastal strip, the new housing developments and the many, many small villages which mark our landscape. All are equally important to us, and all we are seeking to serve in making known the good news of Jesus that has been entrusted to us.

In preparation for our recent ‘Peer Review’ we put together our diocesan mission and vision statements and summarised our intention as follows ‘Our aim then is to grow the Church, in both numbers and depth, through attention to what we see as our core tasks of faithful worship, confident discipleship and joyful service with the vision of being a healthy, vibrant, sustainable church which leads to transformed lives and communities across greater Lincolnshire making a difference in God’s world. To that end as a diocese we shall support, encourage and enable local parishes, benefices and mission communities to fulfil, within this framework, their own unique calling to serve in mission the community or communities in which they are set’.

In short we don’t believe in a big top down diocesan master plan. We do believe in supporting and encouraging our parishes to develop their own plans which we will then seek to support and encourage using central diocesan resources as we are able.

To that end we have begun an ambitious programme to try and increase the number of good quality, creative stipendiary clergy in the diocese by almost 50%, and have established a regular pattern of episcopal visitations and MDR to show our support and commitment to those working in parish ministry. We have established the principle that we are a ‘learning diocese’ and are actively creating and investing in ‘learning communities’ according to the different ‘character areas’ we operate in so that we can learn from and support each other. We are committed to the principle of mission action planning and have a small team who can assist parishes with that, and have released some of our historic resources to enable parishes to apply for funding to help them in making those plans a reality, in addition to also using some of those resources to invest in good quality CMD and clergy well-being.

We are not unaware of the challenges we face. The deanery of Holland, of which these particular benefices are part, on an average Sunday connects with 1% of its total population, but we are committed to ‘having a go’, to sharing what we know to be the good news of Jesus to the different communities we are here to serve, and if that resonates with you, then please read on with all that follows .........
About the Parish

The hamlet of Scirebec is listed in the Domesday Book of 1085 and predates the town of Boston by about 200 years. The name Skirbeck derives from Scirebec which means ‘clear stream’. This waterway, which has long since disappeared, formed the natural boundary on the northern and eastern side of the original Parish. The present Church of St Nicholas dates from approximately 1180 and has undergone many dilapidations and restorations over the centuries. The Church is adjacent to The Haven, tidal side of the River Witham, which forms the southern border. In the 16th century, after terrible high tides and flooding, much of the Church was beyond repair and, therefore, parts were demolished. Re-building of the north and south aisles took place in the late 19th century and the chancel completed in 1935. Two daughter churches were built in early Victorian times – Holy Trinity on the northern boundary and St Thomas’, Skirbeck Quarter on the other side of the river on the south side. These have long since been separate ecclesiastical parishes and both are still active. St Nicholas Church is the only Christian building within Skirbeck Parish, which now only exists as an ecclesiastical Parish since it has been part of the Borough of Boston since the 1930s.

The Parish, with a suburban population of over 8100, lies to the east of the town of Boston in Lincolnshire. Following a change in boundaries in April 2009, the Parish acquired a large area previously part of Fishtoft Parish to the east. A map shows the area with shaded part B now in the Parish of Skirbeck.

The population is wide-ranging from young families to retired people. A fair proportion are Eastern Europeans, mostly Polish, but other nationalities are represented. There is also a mixture of housing, some social housing and some private dwellings, which gives the area a very distinct feeling of diversity.

The Parish serves two primary schools. The original St Nicholas Church of England School opened in 1862 but, due to a big development of social housing after World War II, a new school was started in the early 1960s, gradually expanding on its current site. This is about half a mile from the Church and fairly central within the Parish itself. As the Church School it has always been the practice for the parish priest to lead collective worship once per week. There are 230 pupils on roll at present. However the school is currently undergoing some major changes but it is hoped the link to the Church will remain. The old school is now a housing estate with a plaque to mark its existence by the entrance. Hawthorn Tree Primary School, dating from the 1970s, only became part of the Parish on the change of boundary and lies in the north-east corner of the Parish. There are 388 pupils on roll but can accommodate over 400. Boston Nursery, on Church Road, works closely with both schools and there are over 60 children who attend in total. Together with both Grammar schools and Comprehensive schools in the town, the area is ideal for young families or couples beginning their new life together. As the Parish is a suburban area, there is the advantage of being close to town and all the amenities but on the doorstep of the rural areas and next to the river for peace and tranquillity.
Boston, or St Botolph’s Town, lies in South Lincolnshire on the edge of The Wash. It dates from the 12th century and was a very important mediaeval port, second only to London, due to the export of Lincolnshire wool. The town was part of the continental trading group known as the Hanseatic League. The wealth of the wool merchants facilitated the building of the magnificent Church of St Botolph, one of the biggest Parish churches in the country. It is famously known as ‘Boston Stump’ - some say the tower was left unfinished for several years.

Boston receives many visitors from America due to the Pilgrim Fathers. The early Pilgrims, who were not from Boston, tried to sail to the Netherlands from Scotia Creek in the neighbouring parish of Fishtoft. They were betrayed and imprisoned in the town gaol. Eventually freed, they regrouped and went to The Netherlands. It was a further 12 years before they sailed on the Mayflower to the New World. Boston, Massachusetts is named after our Boston and the large city of New York is named after a small village a few miles northwest of Boston.
The Church and its people

The current pattern of worship in the Parish, all be it with some amendments having been made due to the current vacancy, is as follows:

- A Sung Mass on each Sunday, together with all days of obligation and other significant feast days.
- A Low Mass is also offered earlier in the morning on some Sundays.
- The Mass is offered daily from Tuesday to Sunday.
- Morning and Evening Prayer are celebrated publically on a daily basis.
- The full celebrations of Holy Week and other seasons of the year are observed.
- Stations of the Cross and Benediction, the Rosary and other forms of worship and devotion are offered throughout the year as appropriate.

The Mass is offered on all occasions using the current translation of the Missal (2011). The Daily Offices are usually according to The Liturgy of The Hours; however, Evensong takes place on an occasional basis according to the Book of Common Prayer.

Worship takes place in a traditional manner, with the ceremonial being undertaken to a high standard by a team of (currently) eight servers, with varying experience from a few months to over 65 years. One member of the congregation has permission to administer the Chalice during the Mass whilst others are actively involved in preparing for worship, as readers and as sidesmen. The Parish is fortunate to have the assistance of three retired Priests and the Sunday Mass is, therefore, usually concelebrated.

The appearance of the Church building is maintained by committed members of the congregation who ensure its cleanliness and a small team of flower ladies ensure that it is provided with high quality floral arrangements when permitted, not just for the special occasions. They are also very active in helping at other churches’ flower festivals, thus showing we are willing to be involved outside the Parish.
The Parish has the availability of three organists, congregational music being supplemented by a recently re-formed choir who provide music, on an occasional basis, both within the Parish’s regular worship and as required at the occasional offices, including weddings and, sometimes, funerals. It has been acknowledged that this is a real asset to the Church, even if the choir is small compared to most Church choirs.

Although at present we have no Sunday School, families are encouraged to bring their children to Mass and we have a children’s chapel with books to keep them occupied if needed. Special family Masses are held at Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Mothering Sunday. Maybe this is something we can expand on. It is hoped that formal Sunday School is something which can be rejuvenated.

Over the last 20 years, there have been many times when we have crowned a May Queen. This is a special occasion for our young ladies in the congregation who have taken it in turns to be both the Queen or one of two attendants. They sit in office throughout the month of May, Mary’s month.

Not to miss out the boys, another tradition we have re-visited is to institute a Boy Bishop on 6th December, St Nicholas Day. This is something that began in the 1950s when a member of the congregation made special vestments but, unfortunately, this stopped for a good number of years due to no young servers being available.

Baptisms usually take place on Sunday afternoons and are a separate service but we ask the parents to bring the child to Sunday Mass the following week and present them with their candle and Certificate so that they are welcomed by the whole Church family too. This is something which we would like to continue.
Over the last few years we have had a large number of children, and adults, confirmed. In general, confirmations have taken place every two years but in some cases yearly. They have always been conducted by the Bishop of Richborough.

On the first Sunday of the month those who have been at the Sung Mass gather for tea and coffee in the Community Centre, with the much anticipated 100 Club draw! In 2018 the Parish’s usual Sunday attendance was 60 with a wide range of ages represented.

The worshipping community of the Parish is drawn both from the geographical Parish and those from the wider local area who value the Parish’s Catholic teaching, spirituality and worship. Maybe this makes some in the Parish feel excluded which is something we would like to rectify. Those worshipping at St Nicholas vary from those who have lived in the Parish for many years to adults who have recently been baptised.

We pride ourselves on being a welcoming church community and all sidesmen are trained to make sure that any new people who come to Mass are aware how the service sheets and Mass booklets are used. A good number of the congregation also personally welcome any newcomers and often one of the Churchwardens is also at the entrance. It is customary for the priest, and any assisting priests, to say goodbye at the Church door at the end of Mass.

**Newcomer’s comment:** As a new member of the congregation, I found it over-powering as it was not what I expected. The incense took a bit of getting used to, and, when trying to follow the service, I got lost several times. However, the congregation helped me and explained how the service worked. Once I understood, I found the service enjoyable, informative and the sermons helpful.
The Parish has a long standing tradition of Pilgrimage, groups from the Parish attending both the Children’s and Youth Pilgrimages to The Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham, which is approximately 50 miles away, as well as making an annual Pilgrimage each Autumn. We support the Shrine by sponsoring a lamp each year.

Members of the congregation have also made pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Eganton. The Parish is also home to The Society of Mary’s ward of Our Lady of the Marsh (Skirbeck) which meets both in the Parish and in other nearby Churches.

St Nicholas’ Church is actively involved in the life of the wider Holland Deanery and Lincoln Diocese. Three members of the congregation are currently elected to the Deanery Synod with a further two having been elected to the Diocesan Synod. Our last Parish Priest was our Rural Dean and a member of the congregation recently served as the Deanery Lay Chair.

All Safeguarding procedures are currently up-to-date and posters displayed accordingly. Equally our General Data Protection Regulations are all in order.

We are also proud to say that our finances are fairly stable and that our Diocesan quota is paid in full every year. The Treasurer is always looking for ways of saving money and we are now signed up with the Parish Buying Scheme for our gas and electric. Appeals for special items of expenditure are usually met. Some of our members have signed up to the Parish Giving Scheme, indeed we were one of the first Churches in the Diocese to do so. We hope to encourage more people to join this scheme this year.

Parish related website / social media:

https://www.facebook.com/St-Nicholas-Church-Skirbeck-210686622469200/

http://www.forwardinfaithlincs.org.uk/stnicholasboston.html
The Church and the community

In 2018, there were 23 baptisms (of which one was an adult), 3 weddings and 10 funerals (7 of which included burial in the churchyard). There were also 18 more funeral services held at the crematorium for people in our Parish for which the Parish priest conducted the ceremony. In all pastoral cases, the Parish priest visited the families to discuss arrangements, provided pastoral care and reiterated the Christian commitments being made with regard to baptisms and weddings. There is full support all the way through the process for those involved.

In September 2014, as part of our Mission Action Plan, we started our Messy Church once a month in the Community Hall. It has always been run by members of the congregation. From small beginnings, there are now several families who belong to the group, although not all families come every time. We feel this has been a success for our Parish, in bringing those who come, closer to Jesus and learning of his life.

It has always been the practice of the Parish priest to take home communions once a month to those members who are not able to get to Church. Currently we have no Lay members who are licensed and trained to do home visits and this is something we would like to investigate.

Both schools in the Parish and the nursery attend Church in December for Christingle services. Our crib service on Christmas Eve has increased in numbers over the last few years so that we now have a full Church. St Nicholas School also visits Church on other occasions such as Harvest, Easter and Remembrance.

Fundraising is a big part of the Church calendar and a good opportunity to include the whole Parish community and beyond. We have at least one fund-raising event each month (except for August) and a good combination of larger and smaller social events.

Our main event of the year is the Christmas Tree Festival held the last weekend before Advent and is our biggest fundraiser. The Church is decorated with a variety of Christmas trees according to the theme of the year (this has ranged from ‘Twelve Days of Christmas’ to ‘Children’s Stories’ and everything in between) as well as some floral arrangements at the same time. We have a huge range of stalls and games in the Community Centre and serve mouth-watering refreshments.
Another popular fundraiser is Snowdrop Sunday which is always held on the third Sunday of February. The churchyard looks like a carpet of snowdrops and people love to wander through and take photos. We have the Church open for quiet prayer and again a large array of stalls, games and refreshments in the Community Centre. Snowdrop plants are also on sale, donated by a generous supporter of the Church.

Fundraising is one of our major forms of income. Some of our smaller events are Quiz Nights, Bingo and Strawberry Teas. We also have a local touring Theatre Company once a year. All activities take place in the Community Centre with the Church open on certain occasions. We also do special Harvest and New Year lunches which are very popular.

Our Carol Service each year is in aid of The Butterfly Hospice Trust, a local charity set up for end of life care. This is a connection through one of our retired assistant priests. The choir plays a big part in this service too. The service is always a special end to the year as it falls after Christmas. In July we hold Sea Sunday for members of the Royal Naval Association and Merchant Navy Association. This continues the relationship between the Naval Services and St Nicholas Church being the Patron Saint of Sailors.

St Nicholas is the only Christian Church in the Parish. We are part of the Churches Together in Boston and have taken part in the Holland Places of Worship Festival since it was inaugurated two years ago. We support two charities through our Lent boxes – Additional Curates Society and the Pattaya Orphanage in Thailand. The latter is a connection through a member of our congregation who visits the orphanage each year and the local Church there is also St Nicholas. Closer to home, we support the local food bank all year round with donations the congregation bring. Also, all our Christingle services support the work of The Children’s Society, of which one of our Churchwardens is the Local Honorary Secretary in the parish.
Skirbeck St Nicholas is one of the three large parishes of the Anglican Church in the town of Boston, each offering a distinctive tradition of ministry. Consequently, the ministry of St Nicholas Church and its people spreads beyond its Parish boundaries offering a distinctiveness that complements the other two town Parishes. Given the limited number of stipendiary clergy in the Holland Deanery, ministry here involves mutually supporting one another where the need arises for covering holidays and peaks of pastoral offices. The Churches in Boston have developed a culture of working together on various initiatives and projects. This may start with the vision of one or more people in one Church but, where either a mutual interest is served or where ministering to a particular need is best served by people with the necessary gifts, talents and willingness drawn from more than one Church or Parish, then it can be offered out more widely for prayer and discernment. Where there are multiple Churches that feel led to work together, then they work together in a framework agreed for that project. The focus is often seeking God's calling on us and the building of the kingdom of God amongst the people of the Borough of Boston. This openness to opt in together where desired recognises our common calling to follow Christ whilst respecting the diversity of theological understanding, praxis and expressions of worship. This blessing of openness has been experienced both in the Anglican Deanery of Holland and through initiatives enabled via the Churches Together in Boston executive. It is hoped that there will be a continuing and growing openness at Skirbeck St Nicholas to allow those from other Parishes (particularly the smaller Parishes) to participate in certain activities and events such as training, learning, study and special guest/events etc. Such openness is motivated by mutual blessing and support and reciprocated as appropriate.

Revd Andrew Higginson

Rural Dean – Holland Deanery
Our buildings

The Church Building
There has been a Church on this site for well over a thousand years. The present building dates from around 1100AD and predates the Parish of Boston Church by at least 200 years. Generally the building is in good order for its age.

The rood screen dates from the 1920s while the reredos was installed a little later. The south aisle roof has a covering of stainless steel following many lead thefts and is protected by a security alarm complete with offsite monitoring and audible sirens. The building has a gas fired heating system which is probably well past its “sell by” date but continues to run and keeps the church warm throughout the winter albeit at a high cost in energy consumption. The remedial works following the most recent quinquennial inspection have now been carried out and paid for although two decorative columns remain in storage to be fitted when additional funding becomes available. A new sound system has recently been installed and is currently being trialled.
The Churchyard

A public right of way from the gate on Fishtoft Road up to the river bank exists which is popular with walkers and local residents. Burial space to the north of the Church is complete but a new area has been set aside for the interment of ashes. Land to the south side of the Church has been available for burial for around 20 years and there is considerable space remaining. Many of the graves to the south east of the Church are in excess of 100 years old and therefore this area receives less attention than the other grassed areas.

The Community Centre (formerly the Church Hall)

In order to receive external grants a separate steering committee was formed around fifteen years ago to take control of the Church Hall. A new lease was drawn up so that the hall could become a Community Centre with the Church / Diocese as its landlord. The Community Centre now functions under this arrangement as a registered charity. The lease provides for the building to be used by the Church for 1 day per week and other religious events as required. Normally the committee room is kept available for PCC and similar meetings on Thursday Evenings.

The Community Centre – its users and activities

The Community Centre has many regular users and is fully booked for weekday evenings and each Friday daytime apart from school holidays, as this is when it is used by a Mother and Toddler group in the morning. Good Companions, an over-60s group, use the Centre on a Friday afternoon except for August. Regular hirers include Traditional karate - normally Monday and Friday evenings, dance exercise Tuesday evenings, Beavers / Cub Scouts Wednesday evenings and Weight Watchers and dance exercise on Thursday evenings. The Blood Service uses the Centre for blood donations six or seven times per annum and a Health and Safety / First Aid company provide 3 or 4 day training to businesses in the Centre every month.

The Centre is registered with the local council as a polling station and also as an emergency relief centre in the case of a major issue (flooding or other disaster). The Centre is available for private hire and is popular with parents of young children for birthday parties and the like as the main hall is of a sufficient size in which to erect a large inflatable activity centre (bouncy castle etc.)
Our own Messy Church group uses the building for their monthly event on Saturday afternoons, as well as using the committee room for their planning meetings.

The Bishop of Grantham visited us for our Messy Church session in September 2017 as part of his tour during the Holland Places of Worship Festival. He joined in all the activities and was quoted as saying ‘He hadn’t had so much fun in ages!’
The Rectory

Built in the 1940s the house stands in land formerly part of the original Rectory, now in private hands, lying to the west. The property has been extensively modernised during the last twenty years, including the addition of a conservatory, and the most recent alteration being the new entrance to the study separating it from the main house, so allowing church business visitors to be seen without entering the private areas. The south facing lounge looks onto the side lawn with the Church beyond, a gate in the walled area leads onto a pathway which in turn connects to the main churchyard path allowing easy access to the Church from the Rectory. The first floor includes four bedrooms and a bathroom. The house has gas fired central heating and a number of open fires. There is a large rear garden laid to grass. We understand that the Diocese is to make further improvements to this wonderful house before a new incumbent is in place.