

## **The East Window**

**by Benjamin Collins**

*St. Mary's Church, Offton*

On the bench that lines the tower wall beneath the bell ropes, the rector sits in his own stillness and waits. Somewhere in the rafters, a fly bounces crisply off the ancient timbers; the sound of its aimless progress filling the void. Higher still, up in the belfry, the jackdaws – those unruly, unbidden lodgers – briefly chatter and squabble. An outburst from some farmyard dogs dimly penetrates the thick whitewashed walls and then it is gone.

With his hands clasped gently in his lap, the rector contemplates the fly as it continues its journey to nowhere, oblivious to all distraction, deaf to the outside world. His own journey through the years has been no more predictable, but the troubles and travails he has encountered along the way have been impossible to ignore.

When he arrived in the obscure parish with his wife and child and succeeded to the living more than four decades ago, the Suffolk church had cried out to him, begged him to restore her to dignity. *Mary, Mother of God, dressed in her sorry robes*. Other worries, though, had dominated his thoughts until *that* Damascene moment when he had realised his mission. Since then, he had toiled tirelessly in her service. Now, enfolded in her humble glory, his heart sings and he is at peace. He knows that, when his time comes and he is laid to rest in the churchyard, something of himself will live on within these hallowed flint walls.

His gaze progresses up the nave – with its black and red tiles – to the chancel and thence to the reredos behind the altar. There, emblazoned in Gothic script, is the ineluctable reminder of his creed. Claspings the crucifix at his neck with one hand, he begins to whisper his daily devotion.

*... I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.*

Upon *Amen*, the east window ignites in the early morning sun, staining the white altar cloth with pools of colour. He lifts his gaze and allows himself, finally, to greet his infant daughter. Dressed in dazzling white, her golden hair glowing in the strengthening light, she stands, heedless of his presence, in an attitude of perpetual prayer at the feet of her Lord and Master.

He recalls fondly the bitter tears that had obscured his vision in the months of mourning. How they had burst into rainbows one day in this self-same spot, when he was transfixed in a sudden shaft of sunlight that punched through the clouds. Wondrous had been the vision bestowed upon him and, at his own expense, he had tasked a master craftsman to capture it in brilliant glass. Thus, sorrow had been transformed into joy.

Whilst his stone-carved epitaph may grow indistinct with moss and age, Helen will continue, he prays, to blaze in the Lord's service for so long as the church shall stand.