

# ROW AS RECTOR GETS SNUB

A ROW is raging in a village about the future of a crumbling church . . . with the rector at the centre of the argument.

The church at Benwick is in danger as it gradually sinks into the Fen peat and during the next two weeks parochial church council members are due to decide its fate.

Now a suggestion from the rector has caused uproar in the usually sleepy village — despite the fact that everyone agrees it would take a miracle to raise the £100,000 needed to save it.

The Rev John Harrington, who has been rector at Benwick and Doddington for a year, has been accused of deliberately setting out to close the church.

And the rector is just as puzzled with the attitude of his parishioners as they are with him. He says their stubbornness could leave the village without any kind of church.

He has suggested the villagers build a community centre with a chapel included for use by all denominations.

"I am considered to be an outsider but I am really perplexed by their attitude," said Mr Harrington.

"I wrote to every organisation in the village and got two replies both rejecting the idea.

"It would give them a chance to get something for the village for the younger people, but they are not prepared to do it."

Because the church is so unsafe only the front six pews can be used and weddings and funerals are no longer held there.

"On an average Sunday we get a congregation of 11 and a collection of about £3.50 which is hardly enough to run it," said Mr Harrington.

When his idea for a community centre was rejected he suggested a minibus to

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take the congregation to Doddington.

But the faithful 11 have said they are not in favour of the idea. Many said they would rather go to the Methodist Chapel in the village.

The villagers reckon Mr Harrington has not taken into consideration the emotional tie of the villagers with their church.

Mrs Jessie Guy, of 5 Chapel Gardens, at 87 is the oldest member of the congregation.

"It would break my heart if the church was pulled down. It has been part of the village for so long it would be a very sad day when we didn't have it," she said.

Headmaster of the village school, Mr Morris Capper, would like to see a community centre but thinks it is "pie in the sky".

"It would be very nice but the money is just not available," he said.

So the future hangs in the balance. It is almost certain the church will have to be closed but whether or not there is a place of worship to replace it depends on the villagers.



The Rev John Harrington, and the crumbling church building.