

# Meet Verity, a 'Buscot Baby' often in our prayers and now enjoying life!

By Rachel Argent

**Regular worshippers at St Andrew's Church will remember the name 'Baby Verity Argent' appearing on the prayer list for a good portion of 2011. Verity was born 10 weeks early and spent 13 weeks in hospital, mainly on Buscot Ward at the Royal Berkshire Hospital in Reading. Buscot is a special care baby unit and cares for premature and full term but poorly babies. Around 600 babies a year born at the Royal Berks will spend some time on the ward, this is 10% of the babies born at the hospital. Therefore if you are from the Reading area, it is likely that you will know some Buscot babies like Verity.**

Verity's birth was a huge shock to us as we weren't in Sonning at the time - we were on holiday at Centre Parcs with our 18 month old son James.

Verity was born with a condition called hydrops fetalis where large amounts of fluid build up in the tissues and organs causing extreme swelling. It has a very high fatality rate, something we were very glad we did not know until she was out of immediate danger.

After 6 days in Bury St Edmunds Hospital, we were transferred to the Royal Berks.

Leaving her in hospital by herself for the first time was very difficult. In Bury St Edmunds I had been staying on the maternity ward as a patient myself, and this meant I could be with Verity on the special care baby unit all the time, leaving just to eat and try to sleep. However I had now been discharged from hospital and I also needed to spend some time with my son who was missing his mummy.

In the first few weeks Verity required light treatment for jaundice, blood transfusions for anaemia and antibiotics for infections. All of these are common for premature babies.



Verity's baptism in St Andrew's Church

After two weeks in an incubator she was transferred to a 'hot cot' (a heated cot). It is quite an emotional moment when this happens as suddenly they feel more like a 'real' baby as you can touch and talk to them more easily.

Life fell into a pattern of me splitting my time between home and the hospital while John had to return to work. I'm not sure what we would have done without the amazing support of our parents, friends and neighbours who looked after James, cooked us food and did our shopping and washing!

We felt Verity was progressing really well and started to rush around preparing for her to come home, however then her progress seemed to go backwards. She started to suffer from apnoeas (stopping breathing), which meant she would turn blue and need oxygen to revive her. Scarily this would happen up to several times an hour.

As she did not respond to the usual treatments she was transferred to the John Radcliffe in Oxford for further tests. Finally after a total of 13 weeks and 1 day in hospital we were able to bring Verity home for the first time. She had to be kept attached to an apnoea monitor and we had a cupboard full of prescription medication and an oxygen cylinder, but now our family was together at last.

She still liked to keep us on our toes (and on the prayer list!) by requiring several stays in the children's ward at the Royal Berks during her first year with breathing difficulties. Rev Jamie would pop in to see us and to offer prayers and words of support. It was great comfort for us to know that many people in Sonning and around the world were praying for Verity.

At times it felt we would never leave Buscot Ward, especially when you see so many babies come in and then go home and you are still there. We could not have done it without the fantastic support of all the staff on Buscot.

Because I wanted to give something back, I decided to volunteer for the ward charity, Babies in Buscot Support (BIBS). I joined the BIBS committee in 2011 and became chair in 2012.

BIBS is a charitable organisation run solely by volunteers who are parents that have had babies



Verity, a week old in an incubator on Buscot Ward at the Royal Berkshire Hospital. Reading and now...

on Buscot Ward. This means that close to 100% of the money raised by BIBS goes directly to support the babies and their families while they are on the ward. Projects in the last year by BIBS include the purchase of a new transport incubator costing over £35,000 to safely transfer the babies between wards and hospitals, breast pumps for mothers to use on the ward and at home, breast feeding chairs and the refurbishment of two overnight rooms for parents to stay with their babies on the ward.

BIBS volunteers run the BIBS website and social media feeds to provide families with



On holiday with James, Verity's 18 months elder brother

information and places to share experiences. We provide families on the ward with someone to talk to by providing the services of NCT specialist practitioners to give postnatal support, and by having a rota of volunteers who have been through the experience of having a baby on Buscot ward themselves. We also do fun things to try and make the stay in hospital as bearable as possible, such as putting together stockings for all the babies to receive on Christmas Day and providing Mothering Sunday cards complete with your baby's footprint.



... three years old getting ready for her ballet lesson

This year BIBS is grateful that St Andrew's Church has given a donation towards our work. We plan to refurbish the parents lounge on the ward and to continue to help the ward invest in the latest technology and equipment.

Verity is now a happy and healthy little girl who has just turned 3 years old. She attends Charvil Preschool and you have probably seen and heard her, and her brother James, playing around the toy area in church on a Sunday.

She still needs an operation to close a hole in her heart, a common complication in premature babies. The surgery will probably take place later this year - so look out for Verity's name on the prayer list again!

On 2 March I will, together with a group of parents, family and friends of babies who started their lives in Buscot Ward, be running the Reading Half Marathon to raise money for BIBS. I've never run a half marathon before, but I'm doing it for a great cause.

To donate money to  
Babies in Buscot Support  
via its Reading Half Marathon page:  
[justgiving.com/BIBR](http://justgiving.com/BIBR)

For the BIBS website: [bibs.org.uk](http://bibs.org.uk)