



# Friends' Newsletter

Spring  
2004

## From Our Chairman, James Morgan

At the time of writing this contribution to the Newsletter I have just heard the sad news of the death of Phyllis McDonald-Milne one of our staunchest supporters from the very early days of our foundation in 1988. I had the pleasure of sitting next to Phyllis at our Dinner last year and there is no doubt that we are going to miss her cheerful presence in the future. I am sure you will all join me on behalf of The Friends in offering our deepest sympathy to Brian and his family on the loss of his mother.

The latest position on our current project, the Notice Board for the front porch, is that we have got agreement to obtain firm quotations for the design that was on view at our last AGM. I hope that we shall

have the costs available for our AGM in May.

Plans for our Annual Dinner are well in hand and I am very pleased to tell you that our guest speaker this year is Susan Matthews who is the curator of the Stained Glass Museum at Ely Cathedral. The artistry and style of the stained glass windows found in our Churches and Cathedrals throughout the country is one of the glories of our heritage and it should be a fascinating subject to learn more about. Susan has promised to bring some coloured slides along with her so it promises to be a most enjoyable evening. To follow up her talk we intend to organise an evening visit to the Museum to see the collection at first hand and would anyone who is in-

terested please let either myself (Tel 860319), or Cecily Beeton (Tel 860604) know and we will contact you when we have a fixed date.

Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> May is the date of our AGM and Dinner and arrangements will follow the usual pattern of previous years. Full details can be found on the form enclosed. Tickets remain priced at a very reasonable £5 per head which must be the best value meal in the county but then, this is one of the perks of being a 'Friend'. Wine and soft drinks will be available and members are welcome to bring a guest along to enjoy the evening. Tickets will be issued on a 'first come first served basis' so do not leave it too late to buy your tickets from Cecily Beeton as numbers are not unlimited.

Thank you all for your continued support and I look forward to seeing you on May 8<sup>th</sup>.

## Opus Sectile

by James Morgan

Three years ago an article headed 'Wonderful Waterbeach' appeared in the Tiles & Architectural Ceramic Society (TACS) Gazetteer Newsletter. The article refers to St John's Church being "packed with interesting tiles" including a "large area of stunning dado tiling" and "two splendid Powell's opus sectile panels".

I have long been interested in all types ceramic tiles but opus sectile was not a term that I had come



across before so I determined to find out what it meant exactly, especially as the TACS experts had shown such enthusiasm over St John's examples. I could not find the answer in my dictionary but thanks to the Internet and TACS website [www.tilesoc.org.uk](http://www.tilesoc.org.uk) all was soon revealed.

Opus sectile literally translates from the Latin as 'cut work' and is used to describe pictures or designs that have been created from sizeable pieces of cut opaque coloured glass (or stone) as opposed to mosaic which is made up from many tiny pieces referred to as tesserae. In our church the reredos and pulpit panels were made from sections of opaque coloured glass cut to a design, then painted over with the detail, and finally fired in a kiln as with stained glass. They are important examples of the work of James Powell & Sons of London, the leading glass making company of the time, and thanks to Dr Dennis Hadley's research into the Com-

pany's order book records, held in the archives of the Victoria & Albert Museum, full details of St John's purchases are available. The first order date recorded is 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1878 for the 9 Reredos panels at a cost of 155 pounds, and this was later followed on 8<sup>th</sup> November 1882 with an order for the panels on the pulpit, showing the Sermon on the Mount and St Paul at Athens, costing 25 pounds. (Note: according to National Research Tables issued in 1998 the purchasing power of the pound in 1878 was 64 times greater compared to 1998. This gives us a rough indication of the value in today's terms but on top of that we would have to pay a huge premium to a contractor with the necessary skills, if we could find them, to make something comparable.

We are very fortunate to have these irreplaceable works of art in our church and we owe a great deal to the generosity and vision of our predecessors who commissioned them.

## Where are they now?

*Sarge Stevens writes*

According to the booklet issued to every newcomer, Colwall is a large village on the eastern boundary of Herefordshire, about halfway between the towns of Malvern and Ledbury. It lies on the western slopes of the Malvern Hills in the centre of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Historically, the Hereford Beacon, which overlooks the village, was an Ancient British Encampment with the fortifications still visible today. In the Domesday Book, Colwall had a population of 100, once upon a time it had its own racecourse, whilst the main road over the hill - The Wyche was a salt way: today the population is roughly 2,250.

It is basically in three parts, Upper on the top steep slopes, mainly residues of Victorian and Edwardian Estates with large houses, Colwall Stone in the centre with shops etc, and Colwall Green on the flat, with primary school, village hall and sports fields.

It is an attractive retirement area, not only because of its environmental position, but the fact that it is on a frequent bus route, trains from the local station go direct to London, and all the necessary shops are in easy walking distance. There is a well stocked library with a computer centre involving Learning Direct attached, a surgery with two doctors, two local pubs and the well known Park Hotel.

The parish church of St James the Great, which is a mile outside the village, dates back to Saxon times and stands with the Ale House (now defunct) in what was originally the Bishop of Hereford's hunting ground and lodge. The rector is responsible for the parish church of Colwall and the nearby small village of Coddington.

There are two well known boarding mixed prep schools (we live next door to one and Pictons Nurseries, home of the National Michaelmas Daisy collection is our neighbour on the other side), whilst in Colwall Stone all the available building land has been filled up with so called "Swedish Bungalows" and houses, much sort after by some people!

Coca-Cola Schweppes have a bottling plant for Malvern Water on the main road, but this is freely available from the "spouts" which spring up from the hills and there is a steady stream of people with large containers collecting their regular supplies.

The monthly magazine "The Clock", called after the local clock, costs 30p!! and lists thirty clubs etc from Women's Hockey to Darby and Joan. It is a very strong area for music with various choirs and orchestras performing locally and a vicar who is a well above average classical and otherwise pianist - so I am told!!!

## A churchwarden's work is never done

*by Jane Williamson*

At long last the nave re-ordering has been completed and the new floor looks very good. The extra space at the front of the nave allows for much greater flexibility and we are in the process of ordering some chairs which can be used when the choir sing in the nave, or for other purposes. The sound system is in the process of being upgraded and our organist Michael Williamson is still exploring possibilities for an electronic organ to replace the one which is temporarily on loan. There is no hidden agenda here to abandon our pipe organ, which many people still prefer, but to have the option of using either the pipe organ or the electronic one depending on the type or music and the type of service being held.

The next stage is to plan the re-decoration of the whole church, during which time the windows and roof can be cleaned. This will be a major undertaking, I am not sure when it was last done, certainly more than thirty three years ago (which is when we moved to Waterbeach) and it will require careful planning so that the disruption is not too great.

Work is progressing on finding a suitable firm to make the new notice board to be donated by the Friends and this will replace the very utilitarian one we have in the church porch at the moment. With some work on the lighting in the entrance as well we hope this will transform the entrance to the church.

*giftaid it*

Are you a taxpayer? Have you sent in a Gift Aid declaration yet? If you haven't please don't delay. We can get back 28% extra on your subscription if you just complete and return the simple form opposite to Cecily Beeton. If you don't want to spoil your newsletter, please contact Michael Williamson, our treasurer, who will send you a form.

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