



Friends' Newsletter

Spring
2005

From Our Chairman, James Morgan

In the last Newsletter I reported that our current project was very near completion and I am now pleased to confirm that, as I am sure most of you are now aware, the new notice board has been installed in the front porch. It has seemed like a long journey to completion with various changes en route but now it has arrived I hope everyone is pleased with the result. Not so well known is the fact that Friends have provided two secondhand portable coat rails to improve the facilities, as requested at the last AGM. They have the advantage that they can be easily dismantled and do not occupy too much storage space.

Turning to what might be our next project; your Committee has opened discussions with the PCC

concerning the lighting around the steps and churchyard generally.

When requirements are known we shall be able to obtain estimates for the work and it is hoped that details will be available for the AGM. We are also following up two other potential projects, the restoration of the West window and the beautification of the organ. We also hope to have reports and estimates for these projects to review at the AGM.

This year's AGM and Dinner will be held on Saturday 7th May and we hope that as many of you as possible will be able to attend. As well as the usual good food and company on offer, we are delighted that Alan Wyatt has agreed to be our after dinner speaker and his talk entitled "Sounds Interesting" gives us a clue

that musical instruments are likely to be involved!

This year will herald some changes on the Committee as Pam Habgood, Shirley Randall and I will be standing down. One of the vacancies will be filled by an appointment from the PCC but it does mean that there will be two places which need to be filled at the AGM. Either Pam Habgood or I would be pleased to hear from anyone who would like to put their name forward for election, prior to the AGM if possible.

It remains for me to thank members for their continued support and, indeed, a special thanks to the current and past Committee members who have made the Chairman's task so easy and so enjoyable. I look forward to seeing you all on May 7th for what I am sure will be a great day – one you should not miss!

From our Vicar, the Revd. Nick Moir

As I write, Holy Week will shortly be upon us. Ever since I have been here, part of our observance of Maundy Thursday has been an hour's watch in church. For this purpose, the Church Room has acted as the Upper Room of the Last Supper and the Church itself (or the south aisle chapel) has been the Garden of Gethsemane. The decoration is simple – a branch from the churchyard that turns into an olive tree behind the Fen altar.

This year there will be an addition. While the garden will be there as usual on the south side, on the north will be a burning bush – not a real one, you understand, but a product of the artistry of the flower-arrangers. I came up with the idea during the 24-4 prayer event in January. Captain Emma Knights has turned the office of the Salvation Army into a prayer room – it has candles, pictures, symbols, even

mock stained glass. As soon as I walked into it, I knew that I was on holy ground and was able to move straight into a deep experience of prayer. But before I was fully aware of anything, I found myself taking my shoes off – out of politeness, because I was about to walk on a very pale rug, but then I remembered the words of the Lord to Moses before the burning bush: 'Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And it was!

A few weeks later I went on retreat to St Francis' House, Hemingford Grey. I spent hours in the chapel similarly aware that I was in a holy place. The simple flickering candle that marked where the sacrament was reserved was deeply moving – as though the Lord was saying 'I am here'. And then came to mind the hymn we sang at Doreen

Ritson's funeral (her favourite): 'Be still for the presence of the Lord, the holy One, is here... In him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground...'

I had taken away with me on retreat a book by Bishop John called *A Christian Theology of Place*. At first I thought it was a mistake – I'm not very good at philosophy and the first section was very dense! But then his reflections on sacred space began to sink in: a place becomes holy because it is a place where a holy person has encountered the Divine and where others have followed and been drawn into their experience.

The PCC has adopted a new vision statement and we have committed ourselves to making prayer and the spiritual life a higher priority. One of the ways this needs to be worked out is in how we use and beautify our church building so that both regulars and visitors are more deeply aware of being 'on holy

(Continued on page 2)

Where are they now?

The Revd. Lee Batson writes from Saffron Walden

It hardly seems possible but it has been nearly a year since Hannah and I left Waterbeach in preparation for my ordination and curacy in Saffron Walden. We are both well settled now and the time seems to just fly by.

As curate I am part of a team of clergy that serve the market town and seven surrounding villages. The focus of my own ministry is Saffron Walden itself and the small hamlet of Little Walden, for which I have pastoral responsibility. In addition to assisting with Sunday worship, I find myself helping to lead our weekly pram service for young parents and toddlers, taking communion to nursing and residential care homes and helping to lead our youth groups. A particular highlight of my working week is the time I spend in the church school where I can be doing anything from teaching RE to listening to children read. Of course there is much more one could say but suffice to say that I am never bored or lacking in things to do.

I am reminded weekly, if not daily, of the enormous privilege of serving God as a deacon in his church. To be “paid to pray” with other people at key moments in their lives is an experience that is too profound for words, as it is also to be trusted with intimate information purely because you happen to wear a dog collar. This is particularly true when preparing people for a funeral. It still seems surreal to hear my voice intoning, “I am the resurrection and the life” as I lead a coffin in but I pray that I never lose sight

of the trust placed in me to carry people through this crucial stage in the bereavement process. On a more mundane level is the getting used to being the visible presence of the Christian community in this part of God’s world as I walk around the town.

The coming twelve months will, God willing, see my ordination to the priesthood in Saffron Walden church. I will also be involved again in the Vacation Bible School, an ecumenical initiative in which 800+ children come for a week in August to learn about Jesus Christ. I will also be taking a pilgrimage party to Turkey to walk in the footsteps of St Paul and St John.

It has been a particular blessing to me that Hannah has settled in so well in the town. In addition to helping out with the youth work and joining an Emmaus group, she continues to find time to play with the Cambridge String Orchestra and has also taken up playing hockey for the local club in Saffron Walden. Inspired by Jane Williams from Waterbeach, she is also running the London marathon this year for the Church of England mission agency USPG. Unlike Jane, Hannah is committed to only doing it once!

So life is genuinely good. For as much as I am thankful for my particular vocation to ordained ministry, I remain grateful for the part the people of Waterbeach and Landbeach played in preparing me for the job God has called me to do. Please continue to pray for Hannah and me as we pray and give thanks for you.

A churchwarden’s work is (almost) done

by Jane Williamson

After six years as churchwarden this is the last piece I shall write for the Friends’ Newsletter. I am now retiring from the role, two years later than originally planned. For many years the tradition has been that churchwardens at St John’s serve a four year term of office although on a number of occasions this has slipped due to a variety of factors. It is now recommended that the maximum term is six years and so I pass on my keys, log book, file of insurance documents etc with some sense of relief although there will be things which I shall miss. David Armstrong, my fellow churchwarden, has done five years in office and also feels it is time to retire.

Besides the everyday routine tasks, we have been involved with the building of the church room extension, the nave re-ordering and the chancel restoration work. These have all been extremely interesting projects to be involved in. We have learnt a lot about the church building, the complicated processes needed to get authority to make alterations to a listed church building and strategies to get builders come when they say they are coming and finish when they say they are going to finish, but it has been very worthwhile.

At the time of writing this our new successors yet to be elected but I hope that they will find the job as interesting and rewarding as we have done.

From our Vicar

(Continued from page 1)

ground’ and are drawn into prayer and encounter with God. That could be helped by a flickering candle, the reserved sacrament, appropriate placing of the bible and aids to prayer, pictures, displays – and even a burning bush! Your ideas would be welcome.

Don’t forget our Annual Dinner and AGM

Saturday, May 7th

Speaker—Alan Wyatt