



Friends of St Woolos Cathedral

Spring Newsletter – March 2021

From the Secretary



Although the New Year has begun with yet another lockdown and still more deaths from Covid-19, there are at last signs of spring and signs of hope. The vaccine roll out has given many of us a degree of protection from the virus and there now seems to be a way forward to the resumption, at least to some degree, of what we used to take for granted as our normal lives. Perhaps it will not be too long before the Friends too will be able to resume our normal pattern of meetings and activities. I am sure, like me, many of you are eager to see old friends and to make new ones without social distancing or endless Zoom meetings.

One thing we know for certain is that the Friends will soon have a new Chairman. On January 17th the Bishop announced the appointment of Canon Ian Black as the new Dean. Canon Black was born and brought up in Stratford-upon-Avon where he was a young chorister in

Shakespeare's own church, Holy Trinity. He studied in Canterbury and at Lincoln Theological College and holds a Master of Divinity degree from Nottingham University. After some years spent as a Tax Accountant and a PAYE Auditor with the Inland Revenue, he sought ordination and has served as a Minor Canon at Canterbury Cathedral, priest-in-charge of a number of parishes in Faversham and Vicar of Whitkirk. Most recently he has been Vicar of Peterborough and Canon Residentiary of Peterborough Cathedral. Canon Black is the author of several books, the most recent of which is *Follow me: living the sayings of Jesus*. The new Dean is married with grown-up children and he and his wife will be moving to Newport in time for his installation in late May.

In Memoriam

Most of you by this time will have heard the sad news of the death of Miss Jennifer Sollis. Jennifer died just before Christmas and her funeral service was held in the Cathedral on February 2nd. Central to Jennifer's life was the work and witness of the Church and the Cathedral. In addition to a very successful professional life in the Careers Service, she gave unstintingly of her time and energy to supporting the life of the Church and good causes. She served on a number of diocesan and provincial committees and was a longstanding member of the Governing Body and the Representative Body. At parish level she was a member of the PCC and Secretary of the Appeal Committee as well as serving as Cathedral Steward. But her association with the Friends was particularly close. Jennifer had been on the steering committee which set up the Friends under the guidance of Dean Frank Jenkins and she became the first Secretary of the Friends following its formal establishment. But long after she gave up as Secretary, she was always ready to provide help and advice when needed – much to the benefit of the present Secretary for one. Her great contribution to the Church was justly recognised by the award of the Order of St Woolos, something of which she was deeply proud. Jennifer brought to everything she did hard work, diligence and great attention to detail. She was a person of strong and firm principles but also someone with a real concern for others. Many of us were fortunate to be her friends and her passing leaves a sad gap in our lives. *May she, with all the faithful departed, rest in peace and rise in glory.*

Church and Castle



This is what remains of the tomb of Sir John Morgan of Tredegar in the St Mary Chapel. Sir John was Constable of Newport Castle when Jasper Tudor was lord of Newport at the end of the 15th century and his tomb is the most visible link between Newport's only remaining medieval buildings, the Castle down in town and the Cathedral on Stow Hill. But the relationship between these two buildings has been significant in the history of both. Newport Castle is now a ruin with its remains to be found in town near the Old Green Crossing. It was probably built between 1327 and 1386 possibly by Hugh de Audley, Earl of Gloucester or his son-in-law and successor, Ralph, Earl of Stafford. Its position allowed it to control the river and the river trade,

while its imposing structure with three tall towers would mean that it would dominate the small town clustered just beneath its walls. Unfortunately, its forbidding structure did not save it or its town from attack. In this its fate was shared by St Woolos. During the uprising of Owain Glyndwr the church and town were set on fire and the Castle was sacked. All three seem to owe their repair and renewal to Humphrey Stafford who became lord of Newport in the fifteenth century. It was Humphrey Stafford who rebuilt the aisles in St Woolos in the perpendicular style, raising their height and spanning the space with a new roof. He may have started the building of the tower also, at least as far as its lower levels are concerned.

But the Castle in town was not the only or the first castle to be built in the area. Originally there was a motte and bailey castle in much closer proximity to the church. This was the Novo Burgo. Its exact location is unclear but it is widely believed to have been in the Stow Park area, within easy reach of the church. It was doubtless the closeness of the two that contributed to the most serious controversy to afflict the church in the Middle Ages. This revolved around the question of who had the right to nominate the incumbent of St Woolos Church and parish. In 1093, William Rufus had given the right of nomination to the monks of Gloucester Abbey. St Woolos had a good deal of land attached to it and its income from tithes was certainly worth having. The monks used the revenue to pay their wine bill and this no doubt made them especially suspicious of any threats to their established rights. In the twelfth century just such a threat emerged when Robert, Earl of Gloucester and also lord of Newport, made his own chaplain, a Frenchman called Picot, the priest at St Woolos. The monks of Gloucester were outraged and so began a prolonged legal dispute. Eventually the dispute reached Rome itself and the Pope set up a synod of local bishops to look into the matter and make a judgement. The judgement came down in favour of Gloucester Abbey and from that time until the 1880s vicars of St Woolos were appointed either by the monks of Gloucester or after the Reformation by the bishops of Gloucester. This dispute may well be the background to the creation of the life of Gwynllyw which was probably written in the twelfth century at Usk Priory, itself an offshoot of the Benedictine foundation at Gloucester.

Time has not been kind to either of Newport's castles. The motte and bailey was repaired at the command of Henry II in 1185. It was restored again in the reign of Henry III and there were further improvements and repairs in 1295. It was ceded to Hugh Despenser in 1320 but two years later it was attacked by Roger Mortimer who took its furnishings and set it on fire. It required three hundred trees to repair it once more. The castle in town did not fare a great deal better. Its main role was as an administrative centre but even in the sixteenth century it was reported as being in a state of disrepair. Some of its buildings survived in use until the nineteenth century but again were damaged by fire in 1883. Today only part of its east end remains as a ruin. The church by contrast stands as a striking landmark on Stow Hill. It has survived the vicissitudes of time and even in the twenty-first century stands as a proud reminder of the devotion of previous ages and the living faith of today.



Malcolm Phillips