



# *Friends of St Woolos Cathedral*

Spring Newsletter – March 2023

## *From the Secretary*

This impressive monument stands in Llandaff Cathedral. It was built in honour of Alfred Ollivant, Bishop of Llandaff and is a testimony to the esteem in which he was held. Ollivant was Bishop of Llandaff between 1849 and 1882. He had a distinguished academic career before his appointment and soon proved himself an active and formidable bishop, playing an important role in the somewhat neglected story of Anglican revival in Wales in the



later 19<sup>th</sup> century. Alfred Ollivant is the subject of this year's St Woolos Lecture and to deliver it we are particularly delighted to welcome an old friend, namely, **Canon Arthur Edwards**. Canon Edwards is well known at the Cathedral not only as one of its former canons but for those of us with longer memories as a young minor canon also. During his ministry he has served the Diocese with distinction and for many years was Vicar of Caerleon as well as Area Dean of Newport. He is a graduate of the University of London with bachelor degrees in History and Divinity and an M.Phil in History. More recently

he has completed a PhD in History at Cardiff University. Among his publications are books on *Archbishop Green* and *Thomas Thomas of Pontypool*. The title of Canon Edwards' lecture is **Alfred Ollivant, Reforming Victorian Bishop** and the lecture will take place on **Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> May at 7pm**. This is an occasion not to be missed. **Put it in your diary now!**

## *Annual Outing – Winchester 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023*

One of the victims of Covid in recent years has been the Friends' Annual Outing. No more, however. The Committee decided that it was more than time for us to revive the annual trip and is pleased to announce that the 2023 outing will be to Winchester on June 22. The Cathedral at Winchester dates back to Anglo-Saxon times when Winchester was the royal capital of Wessex. It houses the tomb of St Swithin and among its past congregation it boasts Jane Austen. The Secretary is particularly pleased that, apart from the Cathedral Refectory, there are a number of excellent restaurants nearby! More details will follow nearer the time but **June 22<sup>nd</sup>** is another date for your diary – and don't forget to tell your friends as well!

## *Holy Week and Easter at the Cathedral*

Details of Holy Week and Easter services may be found on the website. But it is worth drawing attention to some differences this year: Holy Monday **Reflections on the Hanging Rood** (Canon Andrew Lightbown); Holy Tuesday **Compline with Sermon** (The Dean); and Holy Wednesday **Reflections on Holy Week** (Archdeacon Stella Bailey). All at 7.30pm.

### ***The Cwtsh – 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary***

This is just a bit of gratuitous advertising but one of our neighbours, The Cwtsh Community and Arts Centre at the Handpost, is celebrating its 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. There is an Open Day on **Saturday June 10<sup>th</sup>** and all are welcome to drop in to see the Centre at work.

### ***Brant Pitre: The Case for Jesus (published 2016 and available in hardback and on Kindle)***



Brant Pitre is a well-known American Roman Catholic scholar, currently a professor at the Augustine Institute. As a young student he was shocked to discover that many of the assumptions he held about Sacred Scripture and in particular the New Testament were dismissed by modern scholars. The consensus view of biblical scholars cast doubt on the reliability and authenticity of the gospels. He was told by his lecturers that the attribution of the Gospels to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John was made long after the Gospels were written down to give the texts authority, that the Gospels were not biographies but collections of legends and stories of Jesus initially passed on orally and then later gathered together a long time after his life, that there were other gospels not included in the New Testament and in any case Jesus did not think of himself as God – this was a later interpretation of his life and witness – but as a first century rabbi. This view of Jesus is well expressed by Bart Ehrman, at one time a Christian scholar but now an agnostic.

At first Pitre accepted this view but as he became a more experienced scholar, developing particular expertise in the first century Jewish background to the gospels, he came to question this interpretation. The result is this short and accessible book which gives a much more traditional account of the writing of the Gospels but one grounded in contemporary scholarship. His research into the most ancient manuscripts of the Gospels show them all to have attributions to the traditional evangelists. There is no evidence that the Gospels were originally anonymous. Contrast this with the Epistle to the Hebrews where manuscripts have a variety of attributions including St Paul, St Timothy and that prolific author, Anon. It is also striking that whereas the apocryphal gospels are often attributed to apostles, none of the canonical gospels are, save for John. Questions have been raised whether the authors of the Gospels were literate enough to write a Gospel but Matthew was a tax collector and the normal practice in the ancient world was to dictate a work to a scribe – something quite possible even for a Galilean fisherman. Support for the traditional attributions also comes from the witness of the early Fathers such as Papias, Irenaeus and Justin Martyr among others. The early Fathers are also unanimous in rejecting apocryphal gospels such as those of Thomas and Judas which show signs of being products of the Gnostic heresies of the second century. Pitre asserts that the Gospels are in fact ancient biographies which habitually did not attempt to record everything in detail or even in chronological order but rather sought to bring out the most significant things of a man's life. He also points out that scholars have been too ready to assume that Our Lord's words concerning the destruction of the temple have to imply that the Gospels were written after the fall of Jerusalem in AD70. Pitre uses his knowledge of Judaism to put the Gospels in their Jewish context and in particular, shows how Jesus' life fits in with the expectations of the Messiah's appearance among the Israelites of the first century. He also contests the idea that Jesus did not admit to being God in the any of the synoptic gospels. In fact, he argues that what Jesus did – forgiving sins, stilling the storm and raising the dead – in the mind of first century Jews could only mean he was the Son of God because those actions belonged to the Almighty alone. Pitre sees in the accounts of Jesus' death and resurrection further confirmation that Jesus was the Messiah and the Son of God.

Pitre's *Case for Jesus* does not, of course, remove the need for faith but it does provide a sound basis for that faith in its critical analysis of the New Testament writers. He is not alone in finding grounds for a more conservative reading of the Gospels but he has provided new evidence and thoughtful interpretation within a small and readable compass. A good start some might think for the approach of Holy Week and another celebration of the Paschal Mystery.

*Malcolm Phillips*