



Friends of St Woolos Cathedral

Autumn Newsletter – October 2023

From the Secretary



This picture shows the new Dean's cope which was purchased with a donation from the Friends – the first such donation the Friends have made since the beginning of the pandemic. It was designed and produced by Croft Design, a firm based in Much Wenlock, Shropshire. The shield at the back echoes the East Window in the Cathedral and this makes it quite distinctive. Apart from its use in the Cathedral itself, the Dean intends to use it when representing the Cathedral and Diocese at provincial and other events – a small Cathedral and Diocese needs all the publicity it can get!

Work has been proceeding in recent months to assess the state of the building and to prepare proposals to deal with its needs. There has been a thorough survey, including by drone, of the state of the tower and we now have a detailed picture of the stonework. Proposals for the work on the tower should be presented to the Chapter very shortly. In the meantime, work on the roof over the processional way and the organ loft has been completed and new boarding has been put up at the West Door to provide a wider and more attractive entrance into the building. There has also been remedial work on the stone floor, initially in the chancel where re-pointing of the stonework was

urgently needed. A list of future works is in preparation and there will no doubt be further opportunities for the Friends to contribute, as far as our resources allow.

Recently, a new appointment has been made to the Chapter which is the first of its kind at the Cathedral, namely a Canon Theologian. Dr Manon Cerdiwen Davies who is currently Dean of Initial Ministerial Training at the St Padarn's Institute in Cardiff has recently been appointed and installed as the first holder of this post. With 29 years' experience in the Church in Wales, she has served in a number of parishes and been a diocesan officer concerned with training and education in both Bangor and St Asaph. At St Padarn's she teaches Practical Theology with the aim of making theology relevant to everyday life. We look forward to her bringing her insights and perspective to the challenges that face the church in this place today.

AGM and Renewal of Membership

Accompanying this newsletter are the Annual Report and other documents for the AGM on November 7th. This will take place in the Cathedral at 7 pm and, in addition to the formal business of the meeting, there will be a sequence of music for the harp performed by Bethan Cole, a talented young musician and accomplished artist. **An occasion not to be missed!** For those who do not use standing orders but renew their membership every year, please return the forms as soon as possible. Alas, we have lost a number of Friends in recent years. Can I urge you to encourage others known to you to join us? Those who came with us on the Annual Outing have told me

how much they enjoyed the day and I am sure there are others who are like minded and would gain much from (and contribute much to) the Friends.

Nicholas Orme: Going to Church in Medieval England (published by Yale press)



As a teenager sitting in the Cathedral, I often used to wonder what had happened there in the past. The great Norman pillars sent my imagination back to the Middle Ages. What was life like in St Woolos then? How did the people of that day and age worship God and live their lives? Well, at last I have found at least some of the answers to these questions. This book by Nicholas Orme, Emeritus Professor of History at Exeter and a prolific author on the Middle Ages, uses a wide range of evidence, some of it obvious and some less so, to give a thorough account of how medieval people lived their Christian lives, how they worshipped and how their faith shaped their everyday world and life experience. Orme explains

how Christianity spread through England from the late 6th century onwards, how new churches – minsters - were established as centres from which the population could be Christianised and from which new churches could be established. These new churches were often built by powerful local magnates or sometimes by monasteries who retained their rights over the appointment of clergy. These authorities were rectors who enjoyed all the rights to tithes and other customary fees but they could not run things at local level and so gave up some of their income to appoint vicars (literally substitutes) to maintain services and to tend to the religious needs of the people. Later wealthy people or local guilds established chantry chapels (there were two at St Woolos) where a priest was employed to pray for the dead and sometimes other chapels were built as offshoots of the parish church. The parish system itself so fundamental to English life over the centuries developed in a haphazard fashion and was a product of local forces that was simply adopted by the church hierarchy.

And what was the experience of church for the people in those parishes? It was the cathedrals and monasteries that set the tone for worship but parish churches mostly lacked the resources to follow this pattern exactly. The Daily Office developed in monasteries and had to be adapted for use at local level, so matins and lauds were combined together as were vespers and compline. But the main service was, of course, the Mass. On Sundays this would follow the Office at around 10.00 am. Until the development of clocks, timings were somewhat uncertain. Many priests were not well-educated and could only just about read the services. The text used for the Mass was mostly the Sarum Use and, although in Latin, had much in common with the structure of contemporary Eucharists today. But the laity were mostly illiterate and could not join in the responses in the Mass; this was left to the deacon or sub-deacon or later in the Middle Ages to the parish clerk. For most of the service lay people were silent, praying their rosaries or, in the case of the more literate and better off reading works like *The Hours of Our Lady*, a work whose influence can be found in *The Book of Common Prayer*. Devotion to the saints was a distinguishing mark of the Middle Ages. The climax of the Mass was not Communion – most people only took communion at Easter and perhaps on one or two other occasions in the year – but the elevation of the Host, the moment when the bread became the Body of Christ. Seeing this or ‘meeting your Maker’ was the object of church attendance and people strained to get a good view. At the end of the service the Prologue to St John’s Gospel was read and blessed bread (not the Host) was distributed among the congregation. Perhaps the most striking thing about worship in church was the segregation of men and women. Pews did not become commonplace until the 14th and 15th centuries but for most of the Middle Ages men stood at the front of the nave and women at the back. Apparently, some of the younger men arrived late deliberately, so they could stay at the back and flirt with the young women. Alternatively, in some places men sat on one side of the nave and women on the other. The experience of church was a visual one with the rood screen at the entrance to the chancel, very often wall paintings especially a Doom showing the Last Judgement and the ritual actions of priests dressed in colourful vestments.

This book takes the story up to the religious changes of the 16th century and Orme shows both the continuities and discontinuities with the medieval past. Much changed but much remained the same. There were still parishes and parish priests (now often called ministers); there were still bishops and even vestments and the rhythm of life and the Christian year remained. In rich detail and readable prose, Orme shows us the origins of much that we still know and love today