

MILLENIUM PROJECT – KNEELERS

by Mary Sinclair

The Greyfriars kneeler-making project started, as many big ideas do, with a casual chat. Several of us were tidying up after decorating the church for Easter in 2000. Someone admired the altar rail and chancel kneelers and said “wouldn't it be lovely to have pew kneelers as well”. Joan Williams, who had a City and Guilds Embroidery diploma, looked straight at me and said “I'll do the designs and you can get the gang together”. So from that we arranged an open meeting in Greyfriars House for anyone who was interested, and the whole thing took off.

MILLENIUM PROJECT KNEELERS – The Ten Designs by Joan Williams

Pentecost - *Flames or tongues of fire.*

The Cross - *Based on the Celtic Cross on the Altar.*

The Boat - *Taken from the MacLellan coat of arms above the tomb in the chancel.*

Fish - *The first of these kneelers is dedicated to the men who were lost aboard the Mhari –L.*

Quaich - *The Scottish ‘cup’ with Communion wafer.*

Scallop Shell - *Kirkcudbright Coat of Arms; Fishing industry; symbol of pilgrimage.*

The Nativity - *A crib.*

Turtle Dove - *A sign of peace.*

The Kirkcudbright Centipede - *The Greyfriars Sunday School inspired by the song written by local musicians.*

Gospel Symbols - *Matthew / the lion; Mark / the ox; Luke / the man; John / the eagle.*

After several weeks of planning, during which time Joan and I worked on the designs and transferred them to working drawings, sourced suppliers of suitable canvas, wool and foam pads, then made the first two samples, we were ready for the first of many Wednesday morning working groups on 20th September 2000. Some of the group were experienced stitchers. Others were keen but doubtful, and once they tried the stitches on a small sample, with Joan's encouragement, produced beautiful work. One of Joan's neighbours, Alf Russell, a professional upholsterer, just said “keep them coming”, and he completed every kneeler for us. Altogether 32 people were involved, including Minnie Hall, who made our tea and coffee every week.

Most of the kneelers have initials or names on one side. These could be of the maker, the donor, or in memory of a special person. The full Christian names are of the children who were in the Sunday school at the time. A leaflet was produced to explain the significance of the different designs, which are special to Kirkcudbright. There are ten different designs, and six kneelers of each design plus the two samples Joan and I made at the beginning. We also made the two larger wedding kneelers to complete the full set in 2002.

This project was funded by many generous donations from church members and £200 from the Ladies' Guild. All the exact details with names of the makers, donors and initials, and the original designs are held in the church archives, together with some photographs, should you wish to know more. We all agreed that one of the best things that came of this project was the fun, fellowship,

happiness and love that we all enjoyed together on our Wednesday mornings.

BARBARA HAWKESFORD SHARES HER HAPPY MEMORIES OF JOINING IN THE MILLENIUM PROJECT

I didn't come to Kirkcudbright until 2001 and by then the kneelers were well into production.

Peggy Smith, whom I know a lot of people will remember, encouraged myself and my aunt to join in the fun of finishing them off. At that particular point Pauline Saul had moved into Greengate, and she was also invited to come and join in. Peggy was eager for us to meet including Noreen Dunn. I believe Vivien was working at that time, but came for coffee. It was great fun, a lot of chit chat with tea and coffee. We all became good friends.

The designer of the kneelers, Joan Williams, sadly passed away a few years ago. Mary Sinclair helped us all with the stitching. Joan's daughter, Jenny Wright, lives in Kirkcudbright and goes to St Ninian's Church, Castle Douglas.

We really do live in a beautiful area, with lots to enjoy.