

From Ditchingham to Cambridge – ‘The Long and Winding Road’

Throughout the early part of 2010, particularly Lent and Easter, the theme for St. Andrew's, Chesterton has been 'The Long and Winding Road'. A number of services, workshops and courses have taken place with this theme at the heart of everything.

It all culminated in a wonderful, joyous and prayerful weekend at The Belsey Bridge Centre, Ditchingham, nr Bungay in Suffolk over the weekend of 30th April to 2nd May.

A party of 62 adults and 21 children set off at various times during Friday afternoon, arriving in good time for supper at 7 p.m. After the meal the first of a series of sessions took place led by our superb speaker for the whole weekend, the Rev. Ian Silk, of St. Georges, Lincoln. Ian shared with us that many years earlier (he declined, when pressed, to share exactly how many!) he had lodged with Peter and Margaret Robins when studying in Cambridge, and, as organisers, they had encouraged the Parish Weekend Committee to invite him to lead the weekend for us.

I would like to say that Saturday morning arrived bright and clear but, unfortunately, cloud and rain greeted us as we drew our curtains. The accommodation was first class, with most people enjoying en-suite facilities. Following breakfast and a short all-age worship, Sessions 2 and 3 commenced with a 'Gifts Discovery' Exercise being the high point of the pre-lunch session. Ian shared that he had used this many times before in groups he had led, always with interesting results.

Basically, by answering a whole range of questions, marking them and recording the results under 19 different headings, you could ascertain which gifts you may have and be very good at, and those which may need working on. As an aside, my leading one was Discernment, with Apostleship and Creative Communication at the bottom.

A wonderful lunch was then followed by some free time to spend how one wished (walking, sleeping, chatting etc), and following tea various workshops took place. Each person had been asked what he/she would like to do during these sessions and could choose from Drama, Dance, Music, Arts and Crafts or nothing at all!

Having chosen Arts and Crafts, I found myself in the Conference Room along with seven or eight others (all ladies) who were to make the Altar Frontal, a centrepiece depicting, in embroidery, material and wool, the Long and Winding Road that led to the Cross.

When I asked what could I do, I was in turn asked, 'Can you knit?', to which I replied 'Well the last time I did, I would have been about eleven, but I suppose it's like riding a bike; you never forget. A ball of once used brown and white wool was thrust in to my hands, along with a pair of size seven knitting needles, with the instruction, 'Knit us the Cross please'. Now feeling useful, I

said, 'How many stitches do we need?' to which Eleanor replied 'Twenty should do, I think'.

So began my first knitting experience for nearly fifty years. Casting on (goodness knows how I remembered to do that!) my needles soon began to glow red hot. However, it soon became apparent that if I was to complete this task in time for the Communion Service the following morning, one of two things would have to happen. Either I would have to sit up all night burning the midnight oil, or there would have to be some Divine intervention.

I am very pleased to say that the latter occurred - in the form of Cynthia Bull, who decided to put away the knitting she had brought with her for those spare moments during the weekend and nobly assisted me. An Executive meeting had already taken place between Eleanor and me which had decided that the number of stitches should be decreased from twenty to sixteen (although somehow by this time I had managed to manufacture three additional stitches, so twenty three were reduced to sixteen).

This worked out very well, as the extra width at the start became the base of the Cross. So, with Cynthia and I beavering away from opposite ends of the same ball of wool, and, apart from a break for Supper, working throughout Saturday evening, the highlight of which was the splendid entertainment provided during Saturday evening by a number of Parishioners (I never knew there was so much talent in St. Andrew's), we were able to complete our task by ten o'clock..

The Ladies, meanwhile, continued their wonderful work right up to midnight on Saturday evening, and used the time between breakfast and the service to apply the finishing touches. The result was a fantastic centrepiece, and became the main talking point at the service the following day. During this time we were also treated to the culmination of all the hard work put in by the Drama, Dance and Music Groups the previous day.

Ian's sermon was very uplifting and, after a lovely Sunday Lunch, which I have to say, was again excellent, as were all the meals we had the pleasure of consuming during the weekend, most people decided to start making the Long and Winding Road back to Cambridge.

However, our party, which included my wife Maureen, Jean Jackson and Richard Lake decided to remain behind for a short time, to not only take advantage of afternoon tea, but, as Richard had been tied up with his Music Practice for much of Saturday afternoon, he expressed a wish to take 'The Long and Winding Road' back to Cambridge, in order for him to see some of the wonderful Suffolk countryside, which some of us had enjoyed the day before.

So after partaking of Jam Scones, Carrot cake and other assorted delights, we bade our farewells to the Manager and Staff, saying that we hoped to see them again in the not too distant future, loaded up the car, and started off. We had decided that, as I had driven to Ditchingham, Maureen would drive back.

At this point, I have to say that the car had played up on the journey down on the Friday, but I had included in my prayers on a number of occasions during the weekend, the hope that it would get us safely back to Cambridge, whereupon I could seek out the services of my garage to correct the problem.

Unfortunately, although we got as far as the A143, turning right and safely negotiating the chicken roundabout (many may know this roundabout as having several chickens wandering over it for many years now), as we proceeded up the hill, the car came to a halt at the side of the road and died on us. However, much as we said nice things to it, tried to re-start etc, we were stuck on the A143, just outside Bungay, in the late afternoon on a bank Holiday Sunday. Not the best time, you may think, to break down.

Fortunately, this was when the Recovery Clause in our Motor Insurance Policy came in to its own. Within an hour of Maureen telephoning on her mobile (what did we do before they were invented?), a very nice man turned up from the local Garage with his recovery truck, winched the car on board, and, with the four of us safely ensconced in the cab, proceeded to take us on a conducted tour of rural Suffolk, just as Richard had asked, but not necessarily in the vehicle he had expected.

The reason for going off the beaten track, as it were, was that it would be his brother who would be bringing us home, and that we were picking him up from his bungalow. Although having been on call, he was enjoying the Bank Holiday afternoon with his family.

We arrived at his property just as he had changed in to his overalls, and we were on our way again without any further delay. We again took 'The Long and Winding Road' route, without any of us having a clue where we were. We eventually got back on to the westward A14 somewhere just East of Bury St.Edmunds and arrived home somewhat later than anticipated!

Our prayers had, at last, been answered.

Mike Dawson

P.S.

The car has now been to hospital and is fully healed.