

**“From Church to Cottage Hospice”  
The Story of The Good Shepherd, Five  
Ashes**



This new site at Five Ashes, Mayfield, for a 10 double-bedroom hospice came about by chance and then a great deal of public consultation and hard work. The Hospice in the Weald had managed to involve the 'Courier Newspaper' to run a campaign in publicising for a new site to be acquired in East Sussex as well as fundraise for its inception at the same time.

The story was picked up by one of our parishioners, who alerted me to the possibility of developing the church land where our 'daughter Church' of the Good Shepherd stood – the 'wooden church' with wonderful views. The small congregation was struggling with its upkeep and maintenance but was also wise enough to pray for new possibilities.

We need to go back to the church's own special history of development and outreach. In 1920, soon after becoming Vicar of Mayfield, The Revd. G.C.Pitt-Johnson thought it would be a good idea to create a 'District Church' (what today we would call a 'Church plant') in Five Ashes. This was at a time when cars were few and roads were far less busy but the small hamlet of Five Ashes would feel more 'connected' with the wider rural parish. It was also a golden opportunity to 'grow' the Church's family and fellowship. A meeting was held at which Mr Lothian Nicholson of Skipper's Hill gave a piece of land which to this day, is bequeathed to The Nicholson Trust to keep the Church of England's presence both attractive and 'alive'.

The Church of The Good Shepherd had a previous life as a First World War officers' hut (believed to have originally come from Eastbourne airfield) and was purchased and transported in pieces by the villagers to where the Cottage Hospice has now been created. Electricity was connected to the Church in 1934 when men of the village dug the trench from the road to the Church and it was first switched on for the Christmas celebrations that year.

Both the tiny stone font and stand and the two featured stained-glass windows behind the original altar have been restored and relocated in our new hospice chapel space and activities room.



The Good



Shepherd one was in memory of Mr Lothian Nicholson from his wife and the one of St Peter walking on the sea, to Mr Walter Penn from his friends and neighbours. (They were designed and manufactured by a famous English firm of glass artists, Lownes and Drury Ltd. in 1938). The first service was held on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921, when a troop of cadets, who were camping at Hadlow Down, asked for a service and arrived for it in style, marching, with their band playing. The Church was dedicated on November 9<sup>th</sup> by the Bishop of Chichester, The Rt. Revd. W. Burrows. Ninety-six years later, the Good Shepherd held its last Eucharist there and the rest, as they say, is history.



*Everyone at the last Eucharist in The Good Shepherd Church: 12<sup>th</sup> March 2017*

One of the joys and privileges of being tasked to create a new sacred space within a multi-function room has been to commission a new altar (and credence table), new candlesticks and paschal cross, and behind them some beautiful new panelled artwork. It seems entirely fitting to use the artists' own words to describe their own 'brief', beginning first with the bespoke carpentry of Charles Thomson, based here in Five Ashes:

"I have made an altar and credence table in Five Ashes with local ash wood (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with five legs, to symbolise the roots of our place of worship in this community. My design is similar to the Lady Chapel altar in St Dunstan's Mayfield with a cross-halved frame and open 'cluster' legs, but with a frieze. To make the ageless symbols of Christian worship of altar, cross and candle bases in walnut designed by Anthony Elson embellished with silver, is a privilege for a carpenter of any age. It is my love to find rare local trees which give us the mystery of why the grain is 'rippled', catching the light as seen on the altar top with olive heart and a little ebony."

Our accomplished silversmith, Anthony Elson, says:

"The altar is the focal point for worship and the cross becomes the symbol not only for suffering but also hope. The design should be acceptable for both private prayer and quiet thoughts.

The main form of the cross is made from walnut and at the centre is the cast silver Agnus Dei, a symbol for the Good Shepherd, surrounded by a silver corona. The candles are mounted within a silver pan and both the cross and candles are

supported on three graded square steps, also in walnut, representing the Trinity certainly, but also the passage of life.”

Our textile artist, Polly Meynell, has created a beautiful ‘Triptych’ design which she has called: ‘Deep in the folds of our hallowed hills’ after her family’s walking of ‘The South Downs Way’.

“The Weald is an ancient and largely unspoiled wild place. It is a place many people go to for sanctuary, inspiration and regeneration. The character of the rural landscape is a perfect subject to bring into the chapel space offering solace and reassurance through familiar shapes and colours.

This textile artwork is designed to appear as if the observer were looking at the Sussex Weald through an open window. It speaks of journey and adventure, of the highs and lows within our lives and the complexity of nature; much of which is beyond our understanding.

With an affectionate reference to the Good Shepherd, the background cloth is a woollen broadcloth; un-decorated around the perimeter creating a ‘frame’ to set off the centre embroidery.

The work should be considered as an ‘All Season’ artwork featuring all the liturgical colours in some form within the piece. This will have significance to those with faith, but for those without faith or who are searching for it, the work should still have a resonance and appeal on a different level.

Each panel measures 250cm in height and 60cm in width and together support over 10 kilometres of thread embroidered into the surface.”

The Cottage Hospice project took some four years of planning and negotiation before final ‘delivery’ late in 2019. But the story of the ‘Good Shepherd’ lives on in a new rather than a nostalgic way. At the heart of the hospice movement is its Christian heritage and inspirational spiritual care for believers and unbelievers alike. The Bishop of Chichester, The Rt. Revd. Dr Martin Warner, dedicated the new building and Chapel of The Good Shepherd on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019. He affirmed not only the sacramental heart of our continuing worship but also the sacred joy of service and the privilege of our collective provision and care for the dying. That special task and ‘flame’ lives on for volunteers, hospice staff, clergy, and most of all local families themselves – supporting their loved ones, lifting their burdens, and holding their hand.

The ‘old Church’ is planning to take on another ‘life’ as a military and aviation museum whilst the ‘living stones’ of this new hospice and chapel cry out from a committed foundation and the building for a faithful future. In the words of T.S.Eliot:

“We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time.”

**Fr Nigel Prior: Vicar of Mayfield,**  
*On behalf of The Nicholson Trust, December 2019.*

**“And it’s from the old we travel to the new ....”**



