

CHAPTER 16.
THE 1970's - A DECADE OF INNOVATION

During the 1970's St. John's was served by two Vicars, Rev. Andrew Paine from 1969 to 1975 and Rev. Timothy Fox from 1975 to 1981, men of quite contrasting personalities yet sharing a common theme of innovation. Mary Johnson here recalls some of those 'first times'.

The 1970's were years of much activity with a number of noteworthy happenings and events.

On 21st October, 1969 Rev. Andrew Paine began his ministry at St. John's with his wife Isobel and their two young children. They were a very energetic couple both inside and outside the Church and we had several first time events during these years.

In 1970 Mr. Charles Tudor retired and was presented with a miniature staff to mark his 45 consecutive years as Vicar's warden during which time he had served six vicars. He was made an Honorary Warden for life and this was believed to be the first such appointment in the diocese.



Presentation to Mr. C. Tudor on his retirement after 45 years as Churchwarden.
Left to Right: Mr. W. Hinks, Rev. A.L. Paine, Mr. D. Pitchford, Mr. C. Tudor, Mr. A. Littler.

Whilst on the subject of Church Wardens, in 1974 Mrs. Irene Millman was elected St. John's first female Church Warden, having already at that time completed 30 years as P.C.C. secretary! One of her pleasant duties was to visit Essington's first centenarian, Mrs. Polly Knight of High Hill. Mrs Knight was presented with half a tea service by Mrs. Millman and Rev. Paine on behalf of the Church and a thanksgiving service was held, an occasion reported in the Express and Star.

On Sunday, December 9th, 1973, St. John's celebrated its 40th Birthday and after the 6.30pm Eucharist joined Bishop Reeve, his wife and their guests to enjoy a buffet in the Church Hall and a family photograph. Earlier in the day 150 Sunday School children saw the cutting of a four foot birthday cake in the form of a cross made by Mrs. Linda Sargent.

During these years the Sunday School was thriving and the highlight of the year was the Anniversary (known also as the Children's Festival) when it was often quite a job getting all the children fitted in at the front of the Church and in the choir stalls. They were joyous occasions.

Other annual highlights were the Carnival and Fete in the Summer and the Christmas Fayre in the Autumn.

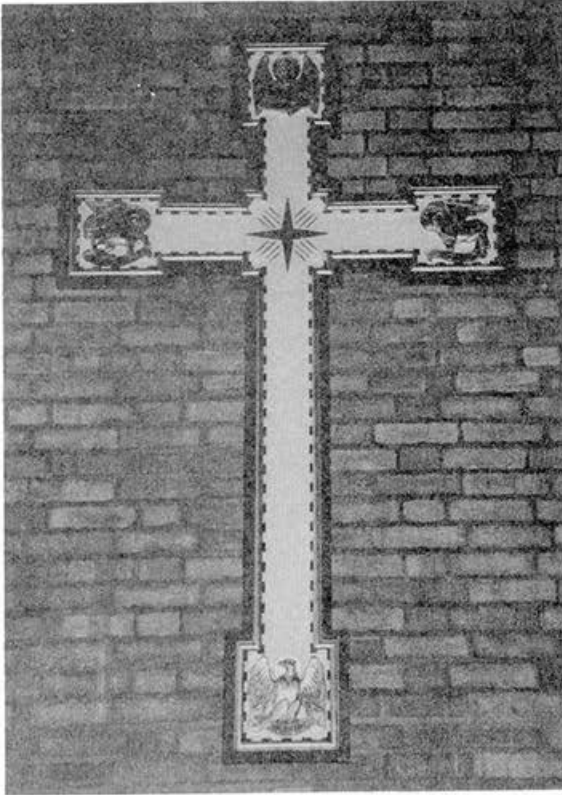


Rev. Timothy Fox and Mrs. Mary Johnson, with 'The Stations of the Cross'

For the former, proceedings got under way with a Carnival procession through the village, with vehicles from local farmers and coal merchants carrying the colourful and humorous tableaux. Afterwards all made for the Vicarage grounds to enjoy the many stalls and side shows and teas on the vicarage lawn.

The Christmas Fayre was held in the hall and was always opened by Father Christmas who then took up residence for the afternoon on the stage in a grotto created by Mrs. Anne (Nancy) Littler. The queue of children would stretch right round the hall and not much trade was done until all the children had been to see "Santa". One of the stalls would be "Nancy's Fancies", lovely Christmas decorations made by Mrs. Littler on pieces of wood and bark with candles, fir cones and various materials - it was always a sell out. We also enjoyed her Easter Gardens and Nativity scenes in the church each year.

The Church Hall was much in use during these years with Sunday School, pre-school play group, youth clubs, keep fit classes, flower arranging, sewing classes and a weekly whist drive. The hall was also the workplace for the Social Committee who took on marathon catering sessions such as 200 people attending a Stewardship Dinner as well as Harvest Suppers. For a time there was also a Luncheon Club serving hot meals to elderly residents twice a week.



**East Wall Cross in memory of
Mr. Sidney Jones.**

During the seventies a firm of industrial cleaners arrived with scaffolding to tackle the grime and huge cobwebs which had accumulated over the years in the church roof and so gave the interior of our church a much needed face lift. At this time two other additions also brightened up the Church. A bequest from the late Percy Griffiths (former chorister, stoker, groundsman) enabled the purchase of a beautiful carpet for the centre aisle and chancel, and a great cross (in memory of Mr. Sidney Jones) was hung above the altar, replacing the blue cloth.

On 10th September 1975 Rev. Timothy Fox was welcomed to St. John's with his wife Edith and their two children. They stayed with us for six years.

One of Edith's talents was baking her own bread and her tasty banana loaves were much enjoyed.

During their ministry we recorded another first with the Flower Festival. Many people worked long and hard and in a few days transformed our Church with their floral displays and works of art. There were doves, a large eagle and even running water! Special services and concerts were held and an endless stream of visitors passed through, all admiring and appreciating the beauty and the message of each display.

Towards the end of the decade the pupils of St. John's School had been busy creating the set of pictures depicting the Stations of the Cross which now beautify the walls of the Church.

Inevitably, during the seventies we had to say goodbye to many well loved friends who by their Christian example had enriched the life and worship of our Church and touched our lives in so many ways.

Goodbye then to the seventies, a decade of pleasurable innovations and enjoyable memories.