

Celebrating 2012: The Diamond Jubilee Year Fifield's Wall Hanging

The tentative idea for the wall hanging was suggested in 2010 as an interesting and different way to commemorate the historic occasion of the forthcoming Jubilee.



As the idea took off consideration was given to size, to possible styles, to content and to practical matters such as: could we actually achieve our aim? Quite quickly agreement was reached; we would work in wool and cotton in needlepoint on canvas, mostly in 10 point with the smaller detail in 14 point, and the finished work should be approximately 2 metres in width and 1.5 metres in depth.

Life through the Ages

A core of volunteer stitchers gathered and meetings were held to agree in detail how the work should be done and what should be included. First and central to the project was the hope that everyone in the parish would put at least a few stitches into the background with a list of those who did take part maintained with the history of the making of the project. Gradually definitive plans took shape. The work would show 'Life in Fifield' through the ages. Lists were made of all the suggestions for inclusion; amongst which were scenes showing 12th century hunting in the Royal Wychwood Forest, Cistercian monks in the 14th century working in the gardens of their grange

farm, the infamous highwaymen of the 17th and 18th century as well as up-to-date events like the Annual Village Fete. Also agreed for inclusion was

occupations from the past like the wheelwright, the hurdle makers, and the glovers. The work would show the oldest house in the parish, one or two typical old cottages and the, still talked about, although now demolished, pedestrian bridge across the Green Lane. This bridge was used by the occupants of the house then called The Gables, to feed their hens in what is now the Recreation Ground, without having to get muddy shoes in the Lane.

'Special Things'

Other 'special things' to include would be the façade at the Old Post Office, once the front of an elaborate ballroom and now always a talking point amongst visitors on foot as they pass it, the annual Summer Fete when homemade bunting is strung around the roads and the whole village takes part, and as the centre-piece of the work and appropriately a little larger than the other main pictures, the Church of St John the Baptist.

Once the eleven main pictures for working in wool on 10-point canvas, had been agreed, more lists were prepared of possible smaller pictures to include. These

would be worked in 6-strand cotton on 14 point canvas for stitching onto the 10-point background and amongst them would be the mediaeval stained-glass window in the church, the Merrymouth Inn (an old hunting box on the coaching road from Burford to Stow-on-the-Wold), and as many little pictures as possible showing the butterflies, the flora, the fauna, and avifauna seen in the parish both now and in the past.



principal stitchers. The dedicated core group of needlewomen planned the work, and early in 2011 began stitching, sometimes alone in their own homes, sometimes in working parties at different houses, comparing notes and finding ways around any problems which arose. When the main pictures were completed, the stitchers worked together in each other's houses where there were tables large enough to hold the full work, and applied the individual scenes onto the main canvas, before starting work on the background.

The Woods of the Wheelwright

We would try to include all the life of the parish today and so there would be the dog walkers, hikers, riders, the farm animals and implements from today and yesteryear, as well as features particular to the parish like the leaves of the *Crataegus monogyna* and the *Crataegus laevigata*, Fifield being a cross-over parish for the Common hawthorn and the Midland hawthorn. We would also include the leaves of the oak, the ash and the elm – the three woods needed for the work of the wheelwright. All the pictures, large and small, would be stitched onto the background 10-point canvas which would then be filled in and for this we would use the same soft shade of green overall, but with many different stitches for interesting texture. At the top of the work we would depict the Cotswold Hills overlooking the Evenlode River. The bottom of the work would have a brief dedication and a list of the names of the

A Splendid Unveiling

The work was completed towards the end of 2012, then taken to a local firm for stretching and backing. On Friday 1st February we saw the completion of just over two years' hard work when the wall hanging was installed in the Parish Hall and, at a splendid party, unveiled by Richard Langridge, a West Oxfordshire District Councillor, who helped the vision to become reality with some invaluable grant aid. The stitchers also gratefully acknowledge the very generous gifts from Geoffrey and Lucy Maitland Smith and June Hare towards the materials and then the stretching and backing, and not forgetting the many stitchers who provided some or all of their own materials. We hope the finished work will hang in the Parish Hall for many years to come as a lasting memento of a memorable year.

Catherine Hitchens