Kneelers at St John's

***Beryl Johnson, the creator of the Kneeler project, wrote:*** My own introduction to ‘doing a kneeler’ was in the early days of the project. Being used to embroidery I offered and was asked to do one of the Peace Doves designs. Having made one, I got hooked with the desire to create original designs with a religious motif for the kneelers. I was fortunate in finding Alison Harris, who was an artist, to create designs for me. She was always very willing and understood the need for the designs to be transplanted on to squared paper to help the person embroidering the kneeler. Each square represented one tent stitch.

One of the first Alison designed was the Pelican with Chalice from one of my favourite fables The image of the Pelican feeding her young on drops of blood from her breast reflect Christ’s sacrificial offering in the Sacraments received at the Eucharist or Service of Holy Communion. Alison also did the Florence Nightingale design commemorating her life of service to the wounded in the Crimean War under very stark conditions. She became known as the Lady of the Lamp as she would tour the darkened tents to give comfort to the dying and those in distress. She died in August 1910.

The kneeler depicting the events in 2011 of the destruction of the World Trade Centre in the USA was the result of a photograph I saw in a newspaper. The black and white contrast highlights the buildings and the fire which swept through them. I added the Peace Dove and the flags of some of the members of the United Nations to indicate their involvement and concern.

I then decided I would like to design kneelers with the words of Jesus known as the Great “I am’s” and I completed five of them. The first was “I am the Fruit of the Vine” which I made to commemorate the life of Jim and Rene Spencer, both of whom I had known well. Rene’s niece Mary Turner donated the kneeler.

The kneeler “I am the Light of the World” was asked for and donated by Steve Cundy in memory of his wife Anne. Steve and Anne were managers of The Rock Public House.

When June Brignell asked for a kneeler to commemorate the Women’s World Day of Prayer, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life seemed to me to be a suitable message. The column of people holding lights represent the prayers of the people and the colours reflect many nations. They are all going somewhere (the Way?) alongside a river which represents the tears of many. The rising sun reflects the hope of the world. In the distance are flocks of doves.

Marie Burrows found the picture for “I am the Good Shepherd”, which is one of my favourites, in a Bible she had as a child. Pamela Barrell enlarged the design and put it onto squared paper.

The last one was “I am the Bread of Life” which was Vera Faulkner’s kneeler in memory of Philip Faulkner her brother-in-law, who had been a Farmer.

The most difficult design was the kneeler celebrating the 900th Centenary of Ely Cathedral, a very important event in the life of the Diocese. I took the design for the ring of people from the badges sold to commemorate the occasion, but the dark pink colour doesn’t show up as well as I had hoped.