

## In stitches @ St George's

### Project for 2015

The photo below shows the approach to St George's Church, Ruishton following the completion of a flower arch which was the 2015 project. Scarecrows on a theme of “the wedding” blend beautifully into the picture.



A small group of friends with no available funding decided to attempt some “yarn bombing”. We wanted our creation to “make a statement” and be noticed. Our group soon had the name of “In stitches @ St George's”.

We decided to knit flowers. This was an easy decision because flowers are bright and colourful and fun to create. They can be simple or complex and there are lots of patterns easily available. Oddments of wool can be used and several local people were able to donate left over wool. Our decision was to use the flowers to create a flower arch which could be placed over the church path. A regular garden arch was used as its foundation.

Using our Parish Magazine and Village Hall Newsletter as well as “word of mouth” we soon had knitted flowers arriving in all designs colours and sizes.



On hearing about the project several people expressed an interest in learning to knit. We started a monthly knitting group and some members of the group have the confidence and enthusiasm to pass on their stitching skills. Run rather like a coffee morning with informal sharing of ideas and patterns, the knitting group became a pleasant social event. At the knitting group we were able to explain the project 1:1 and find people able to help in other ways.

A few months into the project and after the purchase of an inexpensive garden arch at a local garden centre, we began to realise that fixing the flowers to the arch would take many hours. Fortunately a parishioner heard of our dilemma and offered us the use of her garage for the duration of the project. This provided a clean dry space to construct, create and store our arch. The use of this garage proved to be vital in the success of the project.



In order to keep the weight of the structure to a minimum the frame of the garden arch was bulked out with wire netting, both through the rungs and also around the outside. We then covered it with a thin layer of straw held in place by a fruit-netting.

The addition of guy ropes fixed securely to the framework before adding the straw offered essential structural support.





Tying the knitted flowers onto the arch was a very sociable activity. Groups of 4 – 6 met to work for an hour or two. The arch was completed within 8 sessions.

A system of randomly fixing the flowers resulted in an arch which was bright and cheerful from all aspects. We hung some beautiful large bell shaped lilies from the top centre. These made a very nice feature.



A wonderful arch was created, covered in thousands of colourful knitted and crocheted flowers. Many people enjoyed creating flowers of their own choice and the group received donations of flowers from members of the Church and village as well as interested friends and family.

On completion the arch measured about 2m in width and about 2 ½ m in height including the legs. The size presented a transportation problem and we soon decided to carry the arch to the church. This created a bit of an occasion. Six of us lifted the arch onto gazebo poles enabling us to carry the arch to the church with ease. Our little procession was observed and enjoyed.



Once erected the arch stood resplendent over the Church path for the duration of the festival and received a constant stream of visitors.



Some people produced beautifully crafted flowers such as pansies, daffodils etc. we also had various leaves in various colours. These were wired to tent pegs so that they could be pushed into the ground as if growing.



Ruishton Church won the first ever Taunton Yarn Bombing Cup (knitted of course) and as a consequence the flower arch was also displayed at the Taunton Flower Show. A report was published in The Somerset County Gazette and also in the autumn 2015 addition of "Manna". The project also received much attention on the Diocese of Bath and Wells website.

The arch was not strong enough to be sold as a completed item and so it was dismantled. The blanket of flowers found a new home in Wales.

The whole process from beginning to end (a period of about 8 months) was very enjoyable. The success of the "flower arch" project generated enthusiasm for further future projects.



## Project for 2016

Our project for 2016 began very rapidly after the dismantling of the flower arch. The group decided to create a life size nativity scene to stand outside of the Church during Advent. This project was very different to the flower arch. We all had our own image in our minds of what each figures of the Nativity Scene should look. Each figure needed to be both designed and created by group members, no patterns were available.

It was decided to use the figures to recreate and tell the Christmas story rather than set the entire Nativity out at the beginning of Advent. Mary and Joseph arrived with a donkey early in December. The Shepherds arrived in time for the church Carol Service and the baby Jesus was put into Mary's arms following the Crib Service on Christmas Eve.



Early in December a very pregnant Mary was put in place under a securely fixed gazebo, along with Joseph, the donkey and a sheep. A short time later three shepherds arrived, taking shelter in the church Porch.



Mary and Joseph were visited by the Bishop and the Mayor of Taunton Deane when the church was rededicated in December following its reordering.





Jesus was born during the Christmas Eve service and very soon afterwards the three wise men followed their star to its resting place at the place where Jesus lay. To complete the picture the shepherds were brought out of the church porch and join the other figures and this is how it remained until after Epiphany.



This is the complete Nativity Scene following the addition of the magi after Christmas. Central are Mary, Joseph and the baby Jesus with the Shepherds to the left and the magi to the right not forgetting a donkey and a sheep.



### **A closer look at the characters.**

All of the characters were formed using the same basic process. A simple wooden cross supported the shoulders, head and spine of each figure. The stakes were then fixed by a method appropriate to the citing of the individual figure. Joseph and Mary were both secured by driving the stakes into the straw bale on which they were seated. Two of the shepherds were sitting on a bench in the Church Porch held upright by a wooden gripper (see photo) sliding onto the bench. The third shepherd (in a standing position) was very simply secured upright by fixing the stake into a bucket of cement. Two of the Wise Men were standing and the third kneeling, but with all three the stake was fixed into the ground.

The body of each figure was formed using "coverall decorator suits". The all-in-one suits were cheap to buy and easily stuffed and secured to the wooden frames. We acquired reasonably priced stuffing by purchasing used pillows and cushions from jumble sales (they have necessary fire retardant composition). The shaping of the figures was achieved using strips of fabric to bind securely over the suits.

The head shape of each figure was knitted and then stuffed so that the neck could be fastened to the shoulders of the suit, ensuring that the wooden post of the cross went well up into the head.





## The Star



The front and back of the star were knitted separately in stocking stitch and then sewn together with likely padded cardboard inbetween.

The front and back are identical with each limb of the star knitted separately and then stitched together.

The decoration completed the star.

## The sheep and the donkey



Both the donkey and the sheep were formed over a plywood frame, using padding to give shape.

The donkey's coat was formed by wrapping in salvage wool from a manufacturer of cloth.

The sheep had a knitted coat.



