

The Church of St. Peter, Whitfield

JOYCE MOLYNEUX

IN 1992 the church of St. Peter, almost hidden among trees and farmland in the quiet lane of Church Whitfield, celebrated its fourth biennial flower festival. The theme was Wedding Anniversaries and the church was alive with the most splendid floral displays: over 1,000 visitors were surprised and delighted by the sheer excellence of the arrangements. Among these was a 3-tier wedding cake made entirely from white flower heads, bridesmaids' posies and flower-trimmed hats and, of course, displays representing the various anniversaries, from the first, Cotton, to the fifty-fifth, Emerald. All were of the highest standard, but my own favourites were the Pearl, a beautiful display of two arrangements of pale yellow flowers cleverly linked by strings of pearl and delicate shells, and the China, another striking arrangement offset by a fine china tea service.

At any time, however, St. Peter's has much to offer the discerning visitor. One of the oldest parishes in Kent, Whitfield was known until the seventeenth century as Bewesfield, a name still retained in the modern Beauxfield estate. About 762 A.D. the manor was given by King Offa of Mercia to the abbot and monks of St. Augustine's Abbey at Canterbury; a small settlement developed and by the late tenth century a stone Saxon church had been erected, several features of which can still be seen in the present building.

In the twelfth century the advowson passed to the Prior of Combwell Priory near Goudhurst, the church remaining in his patronage until the dissolution of 1536, since when the Archbishop of Canterbury has appointed to the living.

Although the church underwent extensive renovation in 1894 it was spared the grosser extravagances of Victorian Gothic and still retains interesting features of Norman and Early English architecture. The surrounding village remained a small agricultural community until recent times—the 1921 census revealed only 372 inhabitants. Since then, however, there has been rapid development on either side of the Dover Sandwich road and the present population is well in excess of 5,000.

cont.



The Pearl – the 30th Anniversary



The China – The 20th Anniversary



Suitable for any anniversary

Unhappily this growth has left the ancient church of St. Peter isolated from the main centre of the modern village. It stands, in picturesque setting, among fields and woodland, yet is still served by a thriving congregation.

Sadly the church has to be kept locked during the day, but the keys may be obtained from Parsonage Farm opposite: it will well repay a close inspection.

[A more lengthy version of this history is available at the church, price £1.50.]

Letter from Leeds

PHYLLIS DOBBINS, a member who recently moved to Leeds, wrote to Leo Wright, our Secretary, about her new life there. Members may be interested in some of her observations.

"I am still digging myself out from under 30 boxes of accumulated books and papers, but am finding time to enjoy the local amenities. I have already been to 2 concerts, and thanks to the generosity of the local authority to O.A.P.'s have visited Bradford, Huddersfield, Wakefield and Ilkley at a cost of 10p per journey by bus or tram (free after 6pm).

My new flat (4 years old) is in a small block of 12, overlooking a very pretty communal garden and quietly situated in a small road near the university and within walking distance of the city centre.

There are very few empty shops here, and I am pleasantly surprised at the low cost of fresh fruit and vegetables, especially in the large open market. Even milk is cheaper, only 26p a pint.

The city is very green, lots of trees and open spaces with excellent flower displays. Perhaps because of the excellent public transport system the streets are not choked with traffic. The centre is mainly pedestrianised and there are lots of arcades and shopping centres.

A number of old Victorian buildings have been cleaned and refurbished, some in a lovely pink brick, and there is a lot of new building going on in really interesting modern style. All is so different from Dover!"