

## Beautifully Kept



Do you ever feel sad when something good comes to an end? I knew what my daughter was really saying when she said as we drove away from the Cheddar gorge, 'I've never been to Wells'. Her day with Dad and Mum would soon be over. So we headed off to Wells to show her the cathedral, which we very much enjoyed on a previous visit – and to enjoy a late afternoon cup of tea!

We found the cathedral quite bare – no flowers,

ornaments, or wall decorations visible. Of course, it was Shrove Tuesday - and tomorrow was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. The cathedral had been prepared for the six-week period of mourning as the worshippers reflect and meditate on the events that preceded the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, the Christ, Son of God.

The cathedral was built in the 13th century and in the 14th century had required major structural reinforcements as its foundations began to sink. A series of scissor arches on either side of the central aisle and surrounding the quire, add dimensions of grandeur, continuous light and space to this immaculately kept place of worship. The colour and contours of the crafted stone, built so long ago without the aid of our modern equipment, served to increase my marvelling at such skill and perfection.



There was an exquisite beauty in the quire - new tapestries covered the arch insets, pew seats and kneelers. Matching small shades sat on the lighted lamps in front of each chorister's pew. The high altar was bare except for a front covering – a beautiful piece of cream cloth with a centre of large, dark gold cloth thorns so well attached as to resemble a modern representation of the crown of thorns. There was nothing morbid or ornate but rather caused the observer to wonder what it represented - and to the Christian clearly recognisable.

I discovered two more altar fronts safely stored behind glass in the side aisles – one labelled 'Christmas' and the other 'Easter'. Both were similarly sewn on a cream back cloth, one of a star radiating its beams from a focal centre to the edges of the cloth and the other chords spiralling upwards with a foot central to the top frame - the final glimpse of a body rising.

I read the expenditure account of the general upkeep and maintenance of the cathedral to date and the plans for the future. It was quite staggering. I wondered how much care I took over myself as Jesus, by his Holy Spirit lived within me. Could I, and he, wander comfortably in all the areas of my life, my thoughts and feelings, my past, my present and my aspirations for the future? Perhaps I should give a little more time concentrating on the things that matter rather than peripheries and distractions.



What a contrast Easter day would be in that beautiful building! A church resplendent – not only a beautiful building, flowers, and music - but for many, individuals collectively gathering to worship the resurrected Christ who conquered the power of death and sin by his death on the cross.

As I walked down the corridor leading from the cathedral's entrance to the cloakrooms and read the epitaphs engraved on various types of beautiful stone and marble, hung as masterpieces on one side of the corridors walls, I was challenged by the meaningful and sometimes poignant descriptions of the lives

they represented. They were so aptly written that I could sense that I really knew the person I was reading about. I recalled a question asked of us in a service a few years ago, 'how do you wish to be remembered when you die?' It was not meant in any morbid sense rather to encourage us to live our lives to the glory of God - to leave behind something good and wholesome - a testimony to the goodness of God, his faithfulness and provision, so that we could encourage those who followed us.

I never expected a return visit to Wells Cathedral but it gave me 30 minutes of quiet in an extremely busy week and set my thinking, meditation and reflection for Lent. I will look back on it as a gift from God and am so glad that I listened to the promptings of his Holy Spirit to suggest that worthwhile detour.