

Ellen creates new banner for St Peter the Apostle - Friday, 08 January 2010



St Patrick's parishioner Ellen Cunningham recently completed a lectern banner for the new St Peter the Apostle Secondary School on the Boulevard at Clydebank.

Ellen, who has been responsible for much of the restoration work on the beautiful pulpit banners in our own church, was under

pressure to get the banner ready for the official opening by His Grace Archbishop Mario Conti.

She said: "The school asked me if I could do a lectern fall for the official opening by the archbishop and I was quite pleased, given that as part of the art department in one of the amalgamated schools, St Columba's, we had always been involved with the RE department in artwork for the school."

Ellen described the new St Peter the Apostle as "a stunning building" – "This was a great opportunity to do something for an important public space in the school.

"The downside was that I only had about a fortnight or so to complete the work - and that's not the sort of schedule an embroiderer can work to.

"So I said it would have to be mixed media, as a formal piece of work could not be completed in the time."

Former teacher Ellen said that, in actual fact, she produced about 24 rough ideas and a quick colour board for the project – "Only four of these ideas could have been attempted in the timescale allowed and luckily they settled on one."

She added: "My only brief was that it should be meaningful to the pupils, featuring St. Peter the Apostle in some way and that it should be completed in time for the opening ceremony and the unveiling of the dedication plaque by Archbishop Conti and Provost Dennis Agnew."

Ellen settled on the theme of St. Peter's call to the spread of Christianity, featuring the new translation of "You shall be fishers of people". St. Andrew is in the background, in a boat.

She said: "I had to do a lot of internet research to find a Galilean boat of the period, and even the types of fish caught in the lake, and a quick recce of the landscape and even the types of rocks.

"I also studied lots of past images of St Peter, but I always had my own idea of him - as a big strong working man with high emotions and a very great admirer of Christ.

“The school's uniform features purple, so the background is a bluish purple silk and the water and sunset skies were worked in many layers of voiles shot with more than one colour, so the colours move as you move in approaching it.

“St Peter himself is partly painted, partly stitched, and is slightly three dimensional. A lot of the stitching is machine embroidery but some is by hand.

“I enjoyed doing the commission and spent at least 82 working hours on it, not counting the two to three days of sketches and research”

Encouraged by our present parish priest, Canon Gerry Conroy, parishioner Ellen has been working hard to restore a number of old banners which last year emerged from the obscurity of a dark corner of the presbytery.

There is a whole collection of these banners, paid for by the League of the Cross and embroidered by Italian or German and Austrian nuns, some of them possibly finished by or added to – or even repaired - by the Carmelites here in Dumbarton.

“These banners are magnificent pieces of work, which have been embroidered using real gold thread and worked on pure silk velvet,” said Ellen.

In addition to the St Paul banner, which was on display in the church during the Pauline Year, banners to Our Lady and the Sacred Heart banner, there are banners to our own patron, St Patrick, and to St Michael and many other great saints.

The banners are very much part of St Patrick's history and go back to the days when the Blessed Sacrament was processed round the church grounds every June of the Feast of Corpus Christi.