

From the Archives

THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY ALTAR FRONTAL AND PULPIT FALL

The frontal and pulpit fall, based on the Bayeux Tapestry, were designed by Beryl Dean and worked on mainly by her student Elizabeth Elvin. Elizabeth had trained at Goldsmiths College and the Royal School of Needlework (RSN), and she joined Beryl's Ecclesiastical Embroidery class at Hammersmith School of Art in 1964. Beryl was impressed with her technical skills and, with a mounting number of commissions to fulfil, selected her as one of the tiny number of people she trusted to work to her exacting standards. Elizabeth writes:

'Miss Dean, as we all called her, asked me to work on some Frontals with her. I was so excited! I began going after work and at week-ends to her studio at Canonbury Grove. She would instruct me as to what she wanted me to do, then either go to bed, as often she had been working all night, or start working on a new design or project. I learnt so much just being with her. In time, I was allowed to take some pieces home to work on, with full



instructions which we had discussed. She always listened to my point of view as well, which was encouraging.

I worked on the Frontal closely in the beginning, with both Beryl and Connie Bolton. The background fabric was a gold tissue that had just recently replaced the very heavy 'cloth of gold' used in church embroidery. This was backed with a heavy linen to give it strength when working the hand embroidery. Connie firstly did all the machining, applying the fabric pieces, as well as the texturing on the background, before I had it to mount into an embroidery frame. This was a new concept for church embroidery, combining machine texture with appliqué and hand embroidery. The boats were applied using organza in many colours, then the details and outlines were worked by hand in mainly couching stitch with a variation of threads: chenille, cotton, silks and wool, varying the colours and thickness of threads to achieve the look you see today. The comet was worked directly onto the background fabric by hand, using fine wool. The Frontal was originally mounted on a wooden stretcher to keep it taut; this was made to Miss Dean's specifications by my late husband, John.'

Elizabeth continued working on commissions for Beryl for many years and they became lifelong friends. She became Principal of the RSN in 1989, retiring in 2007, although she is still an assessor, a moderator and advisor on major projects. She was the first lady admitted into the Broderers City Livery Company and has recently become the first to be admitted to the Court of the Broderers.

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