

Celebrating 150 Years

The Altar Frontal

By Aidan Dewar

Acknowledgments

This project has been made possible because of the contributions of Alice Dewar, Jim Curran and the Saint Paul's 150 Committee, as well as the feedback and reassurances of many more.

A very special thanks to Vicky Richards for her remarkable craftsmanship.

The Brief

When the idea of a new altar frontal, for our anniversary, was suggested, it was clear a balance had to be struck. The design needed to embrace the richness of our history, speak to who we are now and offer a prayerful hope for our future.

Drawing on scripture, the altar frontal blends the theological and the ancient with the different ministries and groups of our parish, today.

Colour

The primary colour, green, represents the longest liturgical season of 'ordinary time'. Though the altar frontal was commissioned for a specific celebration, it is intended for regular use. An earthy green was selected, to complement the natural beauty which surrounds our parish - look north to the mountains of the Lakes; east to the moorlands of the Trough of Bowland; south to the vibrant agricultural lands and west to the jewelled Irish sea.

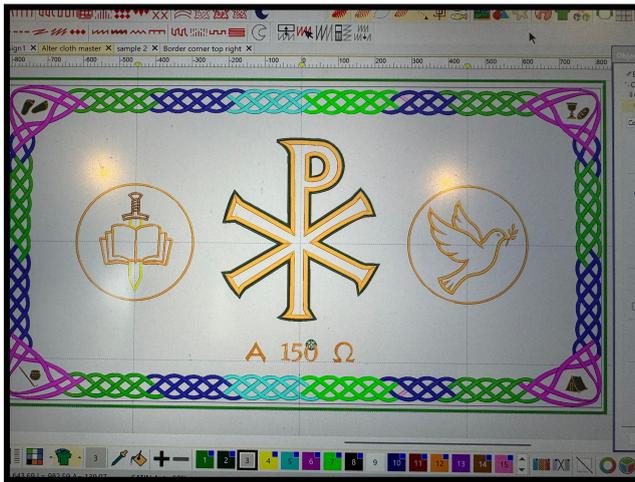
The warm gold used for the 3 central symbols, is in keeping with the warm golds of the church's spectacular eastern apse. A cooler gold has been used on the Celtic knot border to give balance to the piece and allow each element to be distinct.



Material/Making

The cloth is made from upholstery velvet, which changes tone depending on lighting and the angle it is viewed from, giving the frontal a dynamism unique to this fabric.

The initial design was sent to Vicky for digitisation, which is to redraw and refine each component, using computer software. This allowed us to better play around with proportion, positioning and style, as well as making later additions easier to incorporate.



Vicky experimented with a range of fabrics and threads to determine which colours and textures best unified the different components.

Once the final decisions were made, Vicky worked across two embroidery machines, over several weeks, to create the final piece.



The Chi Rho

At the heart of all we do as a church is Jesus and so He is also at the heart of the altar frontal, in the form of the Chi Rho. *"I [Jesus] am the way, the truth and the light..."*¹

The symbol is a 'monogram', a stylistic blending of letters, in this case the Greek Chi (X) and Rho (P). Together they are an abbreviation of the Greek spelling of the word 'Christ'.

¹ John 14v6

The earliest documented use of the Chi Rho was in 312AD, by the Roman Emperor Constantine. It is around this time that the earliest evidence of Christianity can be traced to Northern England. Roman Christians stationed in Lancaster (Calunium) would have been familiar with the Chi Rho as an emblem of their faith.

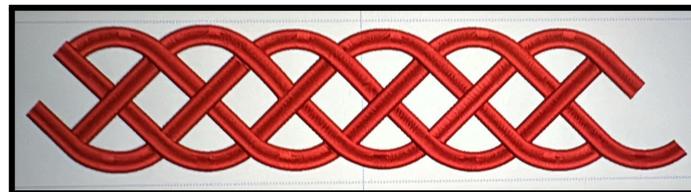
The Chi Rho is still used today throughout the Anglican, Roman and Orthodox traditions.

The Border

The Celtic knot border is inspired by the Lindisfarne Gospels, the 8th century Northumbrian masterpiece, and pays homage to Celtic Christianity. It was under the Celtic tradition, in the Early Middle Ages, that Christianity saw its rapid expansion and prominence in Northern England.

This particular style is known as the 'sailor's knot'. The two entwined strands form an 'infinity loop', symbolising unbreakable bonds, faithfulness and strength. *"I [God] have loved you with an everlasting love".²*

Lancaster has an ancient maritime tradition and so it is likely local sea and fishermen would have fashioned this knot as a bracelet, to give to loved ones, before departing for open waters.



The Book & Sword

These combined symbols have served as the emblem of Saint Paul since the middle ages. The book represents Paul's major contribution to the New Testament, with 13 books of the Bible attributed to him. The sword reminds us of his martyrdom, a consequence of the brutal oppression of Christians under the Emperor Nero. Paul was beheaded in 68AD, only his Roman citizenry sparing him from crucifixion.

"...the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."³

² Jeremiah 31v3

³ 2 Timothy 4v6-7

The Dove

Doves feature throughout scripture as a symbol of peace, presence, renewal and hope, as we see from Jesus' baptism *"and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him"*⁴. Trusting in God's faithfulness, we look to the future of our church and parish with hope.

Both the dove and emblem of Saint Paul are framed in a circle, this helps give the frontal a better sense of symmetry and replicates the painted symbols, as seen in our nave.



The Footprints - The theme of our 150th anniversary is 'following Jesus in the footsteps of Saint Paul'; footprints are a feature throughout. The use of a child's footprints gives thanks for the many children that bless our church, as well as the ministry of Fun Church *"truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven"*⁵. This particular pair is the outline of Tay Dewar [age 2], my son.

The Bread & Wine - The Eucharist is considered the most important sacrament in Christianity. The breaking of the bread and offering of wine is as Jesus instructed during the Last Supper *"do this in remembrance of me"*⁶. Food and drink have also been a focal point within the ministry of our parish, through the Hala Pantry - its mission, to reduce food waste and provide affordable groceries for low income households, is acknowledged with this image.

The Tent - The book of Acts records Saint Paul staying with tentmakers Anquila and Priscilla because *"he was of the same trade"*⁷ - Paul's ministry was largely self-sufficient because of his occupation. Our parish has a nearly century-long affiliation with the 16th Lancaster (St Paul's) Scout Group, which is reaffirmed here also.

⁴ Matthew 3v16

⁵ Matthew 18v3

⁶ Luke 22v19

⁷ Acts 18v3

Pen & Ink Pot - The pen depicted is that of a reed pen, as would have been used by Saint Paul when writing his magnificent letters. Reading and writing are the cornerstones of education *"...God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom"*.⁸ This symbol celebrates our longstanding association with St Paul's Primary School and their vision of 'learning, growing and caring as part of God's family.'

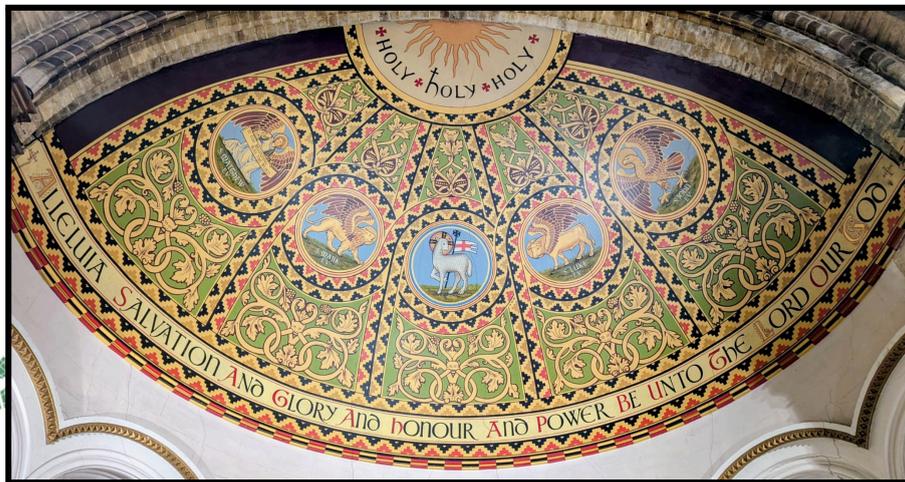
A 150 Ω

The Alpha/Omega & 150

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."*⁹

This quote, from the book of Revelation reaffirms the truth that Jesus is both divine and eternal. The earliest use of these two Greek letters, in Christian art, can be traced back to the 3rd century.

The 150 has been deliberately positioned between the Alpha and Omega, to represent pilgrimage. 150 years in, we are neither at the beginning of our journey, nor, God-willing, are we at the end.



Design by Aidan Dewar
Made by Vicky Richards (Vicky Richards Embroidery)

Additional Images: Lancashire County Council (Trough of Bowland). British Library (Lindisfarne Gospels)

⁸ Daniel 1v17

⁹ Revelation 22v13