

Festal Service

June 24th 2015

Flowers for St John



It was decided that wild flowers would be most suitable. They would, in the past, have been the most readily available form of church decoration for the inhabitants of Sutterby. Gardens full of decorative flowers would have been few and far between and flowers such as cultivated roses and lilies would probably grace the altar and not have been used around the church with the abandon that I had in mind!

When the decoration had begun it soon became apparent that wild flowers were the perfect foil for the time worn interior of Sutterby church. Their simple innocent beauty worked the kind of magic that transformed the patched and battered walls of St John's into a faded fresco with an almost unsuspected depth of texture and subtlety. More sophisticated flowers would have destroyed this atmosphere almost entirely.



It is not, of course, possible to gather wild flowers from the countryside and we are indebted to Dr and Mrs Morgan who allowed the gathering of wild flowers from their meadows and lanes. Without their generosity the church would not have been dressed as it was. The sad rarity of our native plants is not something that would have needed consideration in Sutterby's hey- day!

Most wild flowers do not have a long vase life and so the flowers were picked on the afternoon of the 23rd June and given a good long soak in cold water prior to being arranged on the afternoon of the 24th June. Indeed, the last flowers were only in place by 5.45pm thus insuring their freshness for that evening's service.



A conscious decision was made to use white flowers in the sanctuary as this seemed wholly appropriate and to use coloured flowers in the nave - the congregation's domain - to express in a way the colour of life and the sanctity of the spirit. Running alongside this was the most earthly concern of which flowers could actually be found blossoming that would last in an arrangement! Both cow parsley and hogweed fitted the bill perfectly and when viewed with a critical eye, are found to be very beautiful and characterful in themselves.

Ox-eye daisies have such charm and were much prized in mediaeval times and richer colours were supplied by buttercups, knapweed and red campion. The heavenly blue flowers of alkanet are tiny but lovely and provided the only touch of colour on the east windowsill. As we, sadly, have no lady chapel standing at Sutterby, alkanet was used in the flowers at the blocked North window; a tiny echo of the colour of the Virgin's robes.



Down through the centuries flowers have never lost their power to speak to mankind and their messages can be many and varied. It might, perhaps, be true to say that wild flowers speak with the greatest clarity of all.

Paul

June 2015





With our thanks to Father Peter Coates