

St Barnabas hassocks (kneelers)

Beginning in 1981, a set of 181 hassocks was provided for St Barnabas by members of the congregation and their friends. At the end of this article is a list of most of those who helped.

By the end of the 1970s, the hassocks at St Barnabas were looking shabby and Jean Jessop washed the covers. This brought matters to a head as many of the covers did not survive the washing and several people volunteered to make new ones. It was fortunate that a member of St Barnabas, Norma Foster, ran a wool shop and was able to obtain the canvas for the covers and Appleton's wool, which was ideally suited to embroidering designs on the canvas. Inserting stitches at the rate of 14 holes to the inch was demanding work but we were fortunate that Norma also had another essential skill, having been trained as a draughtswoman. She was able to provide designs that non-specialists could embroider after a short period of instruction.

Norma provided two basic designs but some of the team, such as Betty Mahoney, who were skilled embroiderers, designed their own covers. The basic designs used two shades of blue, two of pink and a lemon yellow but the embroiderers were given discretion in how they used the colours. There was also a choice of background colour, with blue used for hassocks in the main body of the church and gold in the sanctuary and Lady Chapel.

In addition to their time – one embroiderer estimated a hassock cover took 32 hours of work – the volunteers contributed £10 towards the cost of the wooden embroidery frames, canvas, wool and foam filling. The PCC paid the balance from general funds. Most volunteers chose to incorporate something personal in one of the side panels. Some put their initials at the left end and the date of completion on the right. Others chose to commemorate a departed loved one with their initials and date of death.

Some people worked on their own, whilst others met as a group to enjoy coffee and conversation as they worked. One such group continues to meet at Norma's house, even though the hassocks factory has long since ceased operations. There may be a need to start again, though, as at least one has been got at by mice. Otherwise the hassocks have worn extremely well and are a lasting tribute to all those volunteers who beautified St Barnabas nearly 30 years ago.

Hassocks factory roll of honour

Yvonne Davis

Norma Foster

Jean Hills

Jean Jessop

Betty Mahoney

Kriemhild Monnery

Daphne Palmer

Valerie Palmer

Joan Rawlings ()*

(*) Joan's hassock was initially at the front of the church but when she spotted a child standing, rather than kneeling, on it, she moved it to the back where she could keep an eye on it.

