

This was a significant turning point in the fortunes of The Trust - at least from a financial viewpoint. In five years to 1987 total income had been £16,900. In the following five years to 1992 it was £57,370. However, individual membership levels hardly moved from around 230.

During 1993 the 40th anniversary was celebrated with a service in Lichfield Cathedral and also by paying out the largest ever grant to date of £1,000.

The Open Gardens scheme was launched in 1998 which not only spread the name yet more widely, but also has contributed almost £12,000 to Trust funds to date and, as with the sponsored cycle ride, a similar amount going to churches throughout the County.

During the twenty years or so to 1993 many 'special efforts' were arranged to promote the Trust as widely as possible. These included Wine and Savouries evenings, Sherry and Shortcake evenings, afternoon coach tours, musical events and visits to The Palace of Westminster and to Lambeth Palace.

The Golden Anniversary was celebrated in 2003 with a service in Lichfield Cathedral. The trials and difficulties of earlier years were in the past and it was hoped that the Trust would go forward with enthusiasm and meet the inevitable challenges which faced it and all churches of raising funds to help with the ever increasing costs of maintaining the wonderful heritage of churches in the County.

In the 50 years since formation over £300,000 had been raised and of that £247,000 has been raised in the 14 years to 2003. A total of 226 churches of virtually all denominations had been assisted (some on more than one occasion). The largest ever single grant of £5,000 was presented to the church of St. Mary the Virgin, Ingestre during the service in Lichfield Cathedral in 2003.

In the Hon. Secretary's report of the first Council Meeting (now known as the Committee) of May 1956 the comment was made ".....The public are not only interested in the Friends but have responded well to our appeal in such a manner as to make our target of £200,000 a possibility in the next ten years....." These comments were made following the travelling exhibition referred to earlier. High hopes indeed; in fact in the first ten years only £8,147 was raised.

Those early members who had the foresight to form The Friends could not have known the ups and downs that were to befall their efforts. During the Golden Anniversary celebrations the hope was that the future would bring forth all that those early members strived and hoped for and that it would not take another 14 years to raise the next quarter of a million pounds.

UPDATE APRIL 2011

As part of the 50th celebrations in 2003, not only was a Service of Thanksgiving held in Lichfield Cathedral, but also a Strawberry Tea was held for members and friends at Chillington Hall by kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. John Giffard. The highlight of that was a visit by Mr. Henry Sandon (BBC Antiques Roadshow) who gave many interesting and amusing comments on items taken by members for his valuation.

For a few years a stand was also taken at the Staffordshire County Show to promote our name even wider. Also a "Paint-a-Church" competition was organised amongst C of E Schools in the County.

A founder member of the Trust passed away and left a significant legacy of almost £90,000. Since which time a further £42,000 has been received in the form of legacies together with £9,500 from the sale of a property which was bequeathed to the Trust.

Membership numbers have gradually increased to under 300. During 2005 a new brochure was produced and widely circulated.

The pattern of visits continued including Loughborough Bellfoundry (Taylors) and Peter Collins Organ Works. Talks on the restoration of stained glass, the work of architectural stonemasons, the meaning of Hatchments found in many churches, monuments in churches, a Summer Tea Party again with Henry Sandon (but held in a private house) plus a number of 'Church Crawls' were arranged. The Annual Cycle Ride and Stride continues to be the largest source of regular income. In the years since 2007 over forty churches of all denominations have received a total of over £218,000 in grants.