



# the flyer

## Conserving the Bodley Chancel

**Chris Dawes**

In the August issue of the *Flyer*, I summarised some of the conservation work supported by the Friends and some possible future projects.

We now have the report from Carthy Conservation, towards which the Friends contributed, on their examination of parts of the Bodley Chancel. The work was undertaken by visual inspection, using only the scaffolding at that time in place.

The ceiling was painted by William Morris assisted by Philip Webb and Charles Faulkner and may require some conservation work before cleaning. There may need to be some repointing to the walls, using mortar carefully matched to the historic materials and colour. Some of the bricks, red and especially black, are damaged. The black bricks were manufactured by adding soot and ash to the clay; an excess weakens the brick and this may be why they are showing more damage. The walls of the Chancel are also generally dirty from damp, air pollution, candle grease and soot. The main cleaning process recommended reflects experience at Gloucester and St Paul's Cathedrals, as well as abroad, where, as

in St Michael's, important glass or paperwork had to be protected.

The polychrome frieze running below the east window shows particular damage at the south and north corner of the east wall, from a past external downpipe leak - there are a number of more or less radical options, possibly requiring expert conservators and stone-carvers. There may need to be a little further work to the paper angel frieze.



The alabaster altar screen Photo: Martin Knott

Complex cleaning is also required to the alabaster altar screen, which supported the 16<sup>th</sup> century wooden reredos from Antwerp, and to the brickwork around the decorative panels to the south wall of inlaid alabaster, marble veneers and inlays, and *sgraffito*.

The floors and steps to the altar present a particularly complex problem if replacements have to be sought for damaged Victorian tiles, marbles or Derby fossil limestone.

This work has yet to be costed! We hope that The Friends may be able to help support the work, especially if necessary to secure the best long-term options, as I know that many Friends have a particular fondness for the Bodley Chancel.

# Entertained and enthralled by Maxwell Hutchinson's enthusiasms

John McKean



photo: Poole Agency

Maxwell Hutchinson

On Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> October, stormy and blustery Brighton gave way to a beautiful afternoon for the exceptional annual lecture by Maxwell Hutchinson. His subject of what makes a space sacred suggested a set of sibilant subheadings: size, shape, shadow, statement, sound, smell, symbol and sacrament. On each point he not only made us reflect, but entertained with his enthusiasms; and despite no visual aids or even verbal descriptions, his tales and anecdotes enthralled us.

'How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts?' was his title. But it was without the interrogation mark, for these days Christians don't expect direct answers to questions like that. So Max Hutchinson valiantly suggested some clues himself as to what gives a space the possibility of feeling sacred.

For all his fricative consonants, one word he never mentioned was style, but it permeated his complete performance: Max, architect and former President of the RIBA, regular radio and TV entertainer, appeared in the most stylish of rich black priestly garb, from dog collar and black silk waistcoat holding his silver fob chain, to black silk handkerchief, hat and cane, as he talked of his recent ordination in St Paul's Cathedral. Not a very sacred space, it seems. Too big and bright.

I have to admit that his favourite places, from All Saints, Margaret Street near the BBC to the pilgrimage chapel of Ronchamp at the Belfort Pass, are very much my own, and I too would encourage all to visit them. But clearly, were I not to know these places, I would have been hearing a very different talk. One other church

he returned to a number of times was Saint Agnes Outside the Walls, a bus-ride from Rome as he said.

The ancient church he refers to, Sant'Agnese fuori le mura, is a smallish basilica from the 7<sup>th</sup> century (still with original apse mosaics), unusual in that today's raised external ground level gives a long stair descent to the church floor.

Better known – and more fitting with Hutchinson's eight criteria, it seems to me – is the perfect little Santa Costanza which actually is attached to Sant'Agnese. This is a tiny, 4<sup>th</sup> century, centralised gem – with none of the acres of gilded pomp in the big church next door. Now



photo: John McKean

that just shows my bias. But the speaker's enthusiasm was infectious, and I will certainly follow his lead to *The Geometry of Love* by that fascinating anthropologist of the everyday, Margaret Visser (though unfortunately it's out of print) which weaves an important and fascinating tale around Sant'Agnese. Clearly Max Hutchinson's style, as he endearingly puts it, is for 'bells'n'smells and silly hats, and the more the better.'

Small is beautiful, for big makes us feel small; in-the-round is threateningly uncomfortable when the congregation can look directly at other celebrants; do we want bright flooded light

without stained glass, as Wren's Protestant churches? I think not! And the sounds, the silence; who among you thinks guitars appropriate? Or caterwauling singers? And as for the squawking out-of-tune Vatican choir at the last Pope's funeral! We must react to the inherent acoustic to gain access to the divine. I love the sense of incense. Symbols assist us in enhancing the sacredness of a space, and the presence of a sacrament creates a place of sacramental worship.

All this he told us, rather in the tone of - but with considerably more lightly delivered wit than - A. W. N. Pugin, whom he quoted. But all this sibilant sensibility seems summed up in his phrase 'mustiness is reassuring, is it not? A sense of it's a long time being, and reassurance to be, without changing'.

So clouds scudded across the sky as he spoke, at times making St Michael's feel dark, even mysterious. At others, shards of sunlight splashed

through stained glass and formed sharp shadows on pulpit or saint. While the speaker had never been here before, his enthusiasm was unbounded (though perhaps, I wondered as he sniffed for incense, if he'd have been even more at home in St Bart's or St Martin's). Indeed his whole presentation was a most generous, enriching and entertaining offering. He urged us to question and discuss. When asked about the sense of the sacred and numinous felt by Hindus who don't have icons, or by others who don't even believe in gods, he quipped 'some worship nature, I don't like the countryside!'; to the suggestion that there is a lovely chapel-like space in the Moscow metro, 'I've never been, I don't like Russians!' But Rev. Max Hutchinson loved St Michael's, enjoyed his tea, and gave us all tasty food for thought on a par with the absolutely excellent food for greedy stomachs in the array of magnificent cakes.



photo: Gabi Tubbs

## Alexandra Loske Helen Morris

Dr. Alexandra Loske of Sussex University gave an interesting talk, illustrated with photos, on Brighton Pavilion and its contents on 12 September in St Michael's Church. Her talk showed clearly its past and continuing links with the royal family.

Alexandra explained that, whilst there were other palaces with rooms in the Chinese style, for example, Schloss Charlottenburg, Berlin, and Frogmore House at Windsor, Brighton Pavilion was unique in being the best - and most extreme - example of Chinoiserie in the western world.

The Pavilion was finished in 1823 but even before it was sold by Queen Victoria for £50,000 to Brighton Corporation (which helped fund the

construction of another wing on Buckingham Palace), there were design changes to the interior. Queen Victoria stripped the contents, many of which went to Buckingham Palace - even the fireplaces. However, she later returned some items and Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth have given others since on permanent loan. Thus, the organ from the Pavilion Music Room is today used for state banquets at Buckingham Palace. Alexandra showed some impressive photos of items now in Buckingham Palace in rooms which cannot be visited, such as two pagodas in the Yellow Room.

Pavilion staff continue to look out for items from the Pavilion collection, such as the two porcelain pagodas that they bought from Sir Kenneth Clarke, the art historian. They also hope to borrow items from the Royal Collection when the restoration of the Pavilion is finished. The talk was followed by questions and well deserved applause for the presenter.

# Farewell and thank you Friends

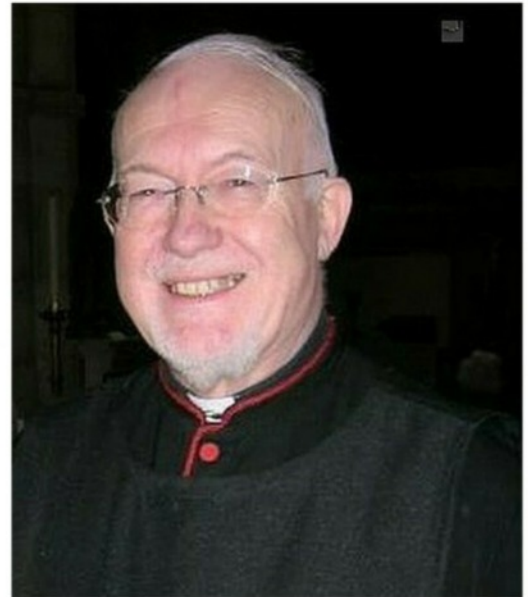
## Father Robert

I have greatly enjoyed my time in Brighton as Vicar of St Michael's these past fourteen years (eight of which I've also been parish priest at St Paul's, Brighton).

The re-establishing of The Friends of St Michael's and its growth as a group has been one of the highlights of these years. It has provided cultural events where one has fun, whilst invaluable helping to care for the fabric of St Michael's and its beautiful objects. It has helped to promote the church as a hub of the local community. I warmly thank everybody who has contributed to the life of The Friends and supported its fund-raising events.

The Benefice fell vacant on my retirement at the end of November, and my colleague, Fr. Mark Lyon, has pastoral care of the two parishes over coming months. We trust it will not be too long before a new parish priest will be appointed.

Whereas I hope to spend some of my time in retirement in Sussex, initially, at least, I shall return to my native town, King's Lynn, in Norfolk.



Father Robert

photo: Gabi Tubbs

I shall much miss St Michael's, and all connected with it, and wish members of The Friends continued success and many stimulating and happy times together.

## Dates for your diary

<b>Fri 6 February</b>	<b>Icicles party</b> <i>£5 per head Friends and guests only</i> <i>Tickets: <a href="mailto:jonathan.prichard@btinternet.com">jonathan.prichard@btinternet.com</a></i>
<b>Fri 13 March</b>	<b>Brighton 1750-1820</b> <b>the rise of England's most famous resort</b> <b>Sue Berry</b>
<b>Late spring</b>	<b>Exploring the treasures of St Michael's</b> <b>David Beevers' third tour of the church</b> <i>£6 including lunch Friends and guests only</i>
<b>Sat in June/Aug</b>	<b>Ladies lunch with entertainment</b>
<b>Sat 20 June</b>	<b>Annual dinner</b>
<b>Sun 21 June</b>	<b>Conversazione</b>
<b>September</b>	<b>Social event</b>
<b>October</b>	<b>Annual lecture</b>
<b>November</b>	<b>An operatic event</b> <b>John Cox, renowned opera director</b> and former chair of The Friends

## Membership 2015

Annual	single £15	couple £20
Life	single £150	couple £200

Download a form from our web site

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