



fly the flyer

Bodley as wallpaper designer

Alison Minns

A passing mention of St Michael's, Brighton in the Winter issue of the *NADFAS Review* caught my eye. The article described an exhibition at the Fashion and Textile Museum, Bermondsey entitled '*Pattern: Watts Architects' Wallpaper 1870 to Today.*'

The link was St Michael's architect, George Frederick Bodley who, in 1874 collaborated with fellow architect-designers George Gilbert Scott and Thomas Garner to form Watts & Co. Their idea was to supply interior furnishing such as wallpapers, textiles, metalwork, stained glass and woodwork for their architectural commissions. The name Watts was supposedly chosen since none of the partners

wanted to use their own name and they hit upon Watts from the phrase 'What's in a name?'

The hand-blocked wallpapers in the modest but informative exhibition ranged from eau de nil, through burnt

ginger to regal carmine. The swirling designs were intricate yet simple – *Venetian, Sunflower, Pear, Rose*. There were samples of the pear wood wallpaper blocks as well as Bodley's designs for an embroidered panel incorporating Japanese gold thread and floss silk and a cope hood in moss coloured silk velvet with embroidered sunburst.

By 1914 Watts had 20 hand blocked wallpapers in production, mostly designed by Bodley. Patrons have included many clergy, aristocrats, the Houses of Parlia-

ment, Cecil Beaton and Ellen Terry. Watts & Co's designs may still be seen at Ham House. The firm of Watts still survives.



Dates for your diary

Fri 13 March 7.00 pm

Sue Berry

Brighton 1750-1820:

the rise of England's most famous resort

Tickets £8 (£7 Friends) on the door

Late spring

Hidden treasures of St Michael's

Third Tour by David Beevers

Fri or Sat 19/20 June

Annual dinner

Sat or Sun

Conversazione

Sat in Aug/Sep

Ladies lunch with entertainment

October

Annual lecture

November

An operatic event

John Cox

renowned opera director

and former chair of The Friends

The Reredos That Might Have Been

David Beevers

A fascinating relic of an unexecuted scheme of decoration at St Michael's Church survives at the Victoria and Albert Museum. Usually described as a 'Specimen Panel for a Dossal' (normally a cloth hanging behind an altar), the section of an intended reredos (a screen or panel on the wall behind the altar), is made from gilded copper sheets on a wood backing decorated with enamel, filigree, and semi-precious stones. The panel was designed by William Burges and made in 1866 by Burges's favourite metalworker Jes Barkentin (c.1815-1883), jeweller to the Danish Court, known as 'the Danish Cellini', who was working in Regent Street, London in the 1860s. Best-known for the presentation vase given by Danish residents in Britain to Princess Alexandra after her wedding to Edward, Prince of Wales in 1863, Barkentin later worked in partnership with the German silversmith Carl Christopher Krall (1844-1924). In 1867 he became the Ecclesiological Society's approved goldsmith.



Specimen panel for St Michael's Brighton
Courtesy of the Board of Trustees V&A Museum

The circumstances surrounding the commissioning of this spectacular piece of Victorian church art are mysterious. The altar plate for GF Bodley's 'old church' was designed by Burges as it was for another Bodley church, All Saints, Selsley, Gloucestershire (1861-2). It is unlikely that Bodley approved of this as he was perfectly capable of designing altar plate at this date, as he did at St Martin's, Scarborough (1861-3). Bodley knew Burges through their membership of the Medieval Society and the Hogarth Club, though there is no evidence that they were friends. The reason Burges designed the altar plate at both Selsley and Brighton may be because the respective patrons knew that the architect had a deep knowledge of medieval metalwork and architecture in France, Italy, Belgium and Germany. He had made detailed drawings of altar furnishings in Cathedral treasuries, including Aachen and Cologne. In 1867 Burges wrote on 'Our future architecture' in the *Builder*: 'The fact is that our ancestors' religion was not simply a mere matter of private devotion or of attendance at church once every seven days: they said their prayers in their churches and therefore had their churches made as beautiful as they could afford. A great cathedral must have been an encyclopaedia of all the knowledge of the time.' Burges went on to say that churches could be beautified by goldsmiths' work or ivory carvings designed by architects who had gained their knowledge by 'wandering to and fro over the surface of the earth.' Certainly the speci-

men panel evinces an astonishing degree of applied learning.

It is unclear whether the intended reredos was meant for the east end of Bodley's chancel in the 'old church'. It was more likely intended for the vast addition to the church for which the patron and incumbent the Rev Charles Beanlands started fundraising in 1866. Burges was officially announced as architect two years later. Bodley was apparently upset at not being chosen to design the additions, but by this date he had forsaken Ruskinian Gothic for what the *Ecclesiologist* called 'pure English forms.' Beanlands was unimpressed and turned to an architect whom he felt could realise his dream. Why a full-size version of the specimen panel was not made is not known. Lack of money or a change of plan presumably prevented its execution, but what survives gives an indication of how rich it would have been.

The work is closely related to 12th century Mosan reliquary chests. Mosan is the term used to describe the Romanesque art, especially metalwork, produced in the valley of the river Meuse in present-day Belgium, Holland and Germany.

The main artistic centres of Mosan work were in Liege, Dinant, Namur, Maastricht and Aachen.



Reliquary of St Servatius in the treasury of the Basilica Our Lady, Maastricht

In the Basilica of Our Lady, Maastricht is a 12th century reliquary of St Servatius, the cresting of which resembles the die-stamped moulding at the top of the specimen panel. Panels of filigree, enamels and gems are found in metalwork attributed to Nicholas of Verdun (1130-1205), the leading Mosan goldsmith and enamellist, whose Shrine of the Three Kings in Cologne Cathedral (c.1200) was well known by Burges. Nicholas's style was continued in the work of Hugo d'Oignies (c.1187-c.1240), a lay brother of Oignies Priory, France.

Continued →

A Friends event with a particular swing!

Ian Crammond

What better way to counter the gloom of an otherwise rather miserable Friday evening than convivial company, comfort food, a glass or two of wine and first rate music. Over 60 Friends gathered in the church hall on 7th November for a thoroughly enjoyable, imaginatively devised and very Brighton sort of occasion. To the accompaniment of the sophisticated sounds of the 1930s Hot Club de Paris we tucked into good old fashioned British fish and chips; both music and food were excellent.



The performers were Dan Sheppard on the double bass, Jason Henson on guitar and the vocalist Sara Oschlag. This hugely talented trio gave us classics of the Django Reinhardt and Hot Club era played with all the panache and up-tempo style the music demands. All three are Brighton based and are rapidly gaining an international reputation. If you couldn't make it, have a look on YouTube to see what you missed! Our thanks to all who organised the evening and those who worked so hard to make this such a happy event - it really went with a swing!

Electrical Icicles

Corinne Attwood

The Friends Icicles Party took place in St. Michael's Church on Friday 6th February, on a decidedly chilly evening. A well-wrapped up hardy group of about 60 gathered in the church to socialise with friends and neighbours, fortified by seemingly unlimited quantities of mulled wine. Tasty nibbles, prepared by local volunteers, were also passed round at frequent intervals. The splendour of the church was enhanced by strings of fairy lights and a pair of giant paper snowflakes, the creations of Alexia Lazou. Alexia herself was resplendent in a halo of electrical icicles, like an illuminated version of the headdress of the Statue of Liberty. The party was enjoyed by all, and no-one seemed to feel or even notice the cold, being suffused by a warm glow from the wine, the company, and the atmosphere.



In an interesting article published in *Harpers and Queen* magazine in March 1982, Anthony Symondson described how after discovering the panel in 1963 whilst researching the history of St Michael's, he brought it to London to show to Charles Handley-Read, a distinguished collector of Victorian fine and applied art and the then leading authority on Burges. Symondson describes how delighted Charles was with the panel. He placed it in the grate at which point his wife Lavinia entered the room. A curious conversation then began between them:

'Booty, don't you think this looks stunning in the fireplace?'

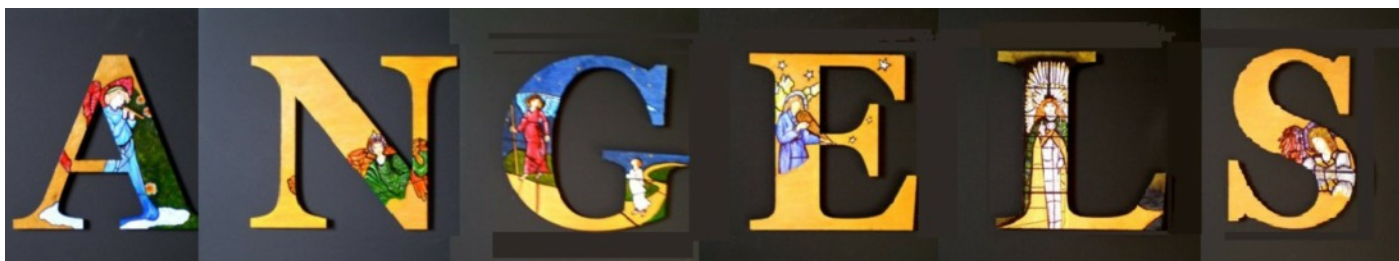
'No, Pussy, I don't.'

'But, Booty, it is an outstanding example of Burges's metalwork, of riveting interest, quite unparalleled. Notice the high standard of execution. We have nothing like it'.

'No, Pussy'.

Lavinia Handley-Read disliked having anything ecclesiastical in the house, feeling that such things should be kept in churches. Today the panel can be seen in the metalwork galleries of the Victoria and Albert Museum, to which it was presented by Anthony Symondson in 1964. What a wonderful additional treasure of St Michael's it would have been had it been manufactured in its entirety to form, in Burges's words, 'another new and beautiful thing in the world.'

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to Michael Hall, author of *George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America* (Yale 2014), for casting an astute eye over an early draft of this article. Anyone interested in the history of St Michael's Church should read Michael Hall's scholarly and beautifully illustrated study. [A review of Hall's book will appear in the next issue of the *Flyer*. Ed.]



Dee Wadham describes her gift to The Friends

What do we call a collection of angels? Even Google can't answer and so I say we have a GUARDIAN of angels at St Michael's... This refers to the parish community who are always the most gentle, loving and supportive of people, reflecting so perfectly the name of our church.

The painted wooden letters representing the 'all angels' in the church's name were created to celebrate its 150th anniversary. The venue was booked for the parish dinner and I had the go ahead to display my angels before everyone arrived.

I later offered them to the Friends of St Michael's to display at events, where I hope they will give pleasure for years to come.

Church Watch

People from all over the world have heard of the magnificent windows in St Michael's. Many make a special journey to see them. It is very important that St Michael's can advertise regular opening times on its web site for all to come and appreciate the church. Yet it cannot be left unattended. The church watch team work in pairs to welcome visitors.

If you have the occasional two hours to spare on a Saturday perhaps you'd like to join the team of volunteers who keep St Michael's open to visitors between 10 am and 4 pm. For more details please contact the team organiser, Penny King: kingprawnbrighton@gmail.com,

Which Pre-Raphaelite artist are you?

Ground-breaking, thought-provoking and hopeless romantics – the Pre-Raphaelites gave us ethereal paintings, beautiful textiles and poetry. Take ArtFund's two minute personality quiz to find out which radical Victorian artist you'd be: A romantic poet with a love of wombats and red heads or a passionate socialist with a penchant for interior design and medieval literature.

<http://www.artfund.org/news/2014/12/10/which-pre-raphaelite-artist-are-you>

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