



fly the flyer

A gymnasium for the imagination

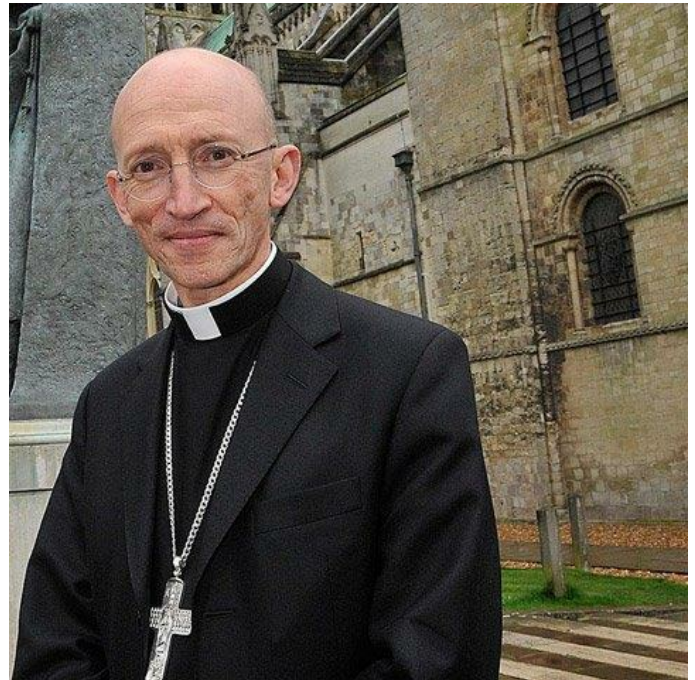
The Right Reverend Dr Martin Warner, Bishop of Chichester

St Michael's is Grade 1 Listed. What are your views on the importance of the physical beauty of church buildings?

Bishop Martin One has to be careful because, as with human beings, physical beauty and moral beauty aren't always immediate overlaps. There are some church buildings which physically are not beautiful but which spiritually, atmospherically and practically in terms of the service to the local community area absolutely amazing. Beauty of itself in terms of a building isn't enough. However a building which is devoid of beauty is unlikely to be able to convey what we might call the other forms of beauty: moral, emotional, spiritual, practical.

Captivating visual experience in terms of atmosphere and artefacts is of enormous importance.

What does that mean for somewhere like St Michael's where the balance is very much in the opposite direction? We're duty bound to value our inheritance as Christians and as the Church of England because our churches represent an indispensable and unique collection that narrates our nation's history. I'm absolutely committed to that. Our churches are the expression of the inherited culture and artistic wealth of this nation. If we were to destroy or squander it we do damage, not simply to those who use them but also to the wider nation. The experience of beauty in those distinctive and unique places which are churches is of itself one of the major avenues for sharing our faith. Captivating visual experience in terms of atmosphere and artefacts is of enormous importance. Some things can't be quantified and must not be commodified. They are invisible, as it were, but real to us in terms of how we function as human beings. This is our inheritance and we have a responsibility to maintain and hand it on, but it also says something about the contribution that Christianity has to make to society.



How important do you think the role of the Church is in supporting the arts?

Bishop Historically the Church has been a great patron of the arts, as a major financial player in society. Today we don't have that kind of financial leverage. On the other hand, the church still remains a significant player in the area of patronage, certainly in the sphere of music (for example in commissioning new compositions and employing singers and musicians), and that can be replicated in many of our cathedrals. Secondly, we would number many Christians who are very instrumental in promotion of the arts. Thirdly, any formation of an artist would be incomplete without reference to the body of art and iconography which conveys faith, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim.

How do you feel about church buildings being used for secular events?

Bishop Church buildings provide, and this relates directly to St Michael's, auditoria - 'gymnasia for the imagination' hosting exhibitions, providing spaces for the arts to be exhibited, and concert halls. For me as a Christian and an evangelist, the imagination, on the basis of Christian anthropology, is the indication of what we would refer to as the image of God. This is what makes human beings different from other animals and gives us the capacity to think in terms of language, which makes the concept of God credible. So anything that prompts the imagination in those positive ways is absolutely critical. As for the forms of the arts for which a building can be used: concerts, drama - it's difficult to draw up a sharp line and say that is a Christian performance and that is a secular one. Events can cross the boundaries of faith and secular identity.

How can a church like St Michael's serve the secular needs of the community whilst remaining true to its central purpose as a place of worship?

Bishop At St Paul's Cathedral I was part of a team responsible for the installation of a new lighting scheme. We had to work both with lighting the building as a place of significant architecture and also as a place of worship. The truth is that it's not a problem these days, because the capacity to dim lights and create a variety and combination of scenes means you can do both. You just programme the scheme to light in a different mood. In a building of that quality the nature of a new lighting installation is going to be expensive because it's got to be a thing of quality which has within it the capacity for flexibility. And if you've got the right lighting designer, the architecture of the building will indicate the intention of the liturgical function that the architect wanted. A number of processes: conservation, relighting, reflooring, invariably give you recovery of what the architect's vision was of how this building works. You suddenly realise that this is where the focal points were intended to be. This is how you were supposed to see the drama of it. The apparent divergence of need over lighting the building is only an apparent one - if you've got a skilled designer.

Can you tell us what you see as special about St Michael's?

Bishop I come back to the phrase 'the gymnasium of the imagination' because I think the Pre-Raphaelite movement was a very interesting statement of a spiritual movement of which the Tractarian Revival was a symptom, possibly a contributory factor, and the Pre-Raphaelites took the spirituality into the heart and imagination of the nation without making it a requirement of Christian faith and conviction. They were modelling something which I still see as important today: the importance of the visual for human flourishing.

St Michael's is probably one of the biggest concentrations of energy and of endeavour to be bequeathed to us as a repository. That's of enormous importance. I also think it's important for us in the Diocese of Chichester on a longer term trajectory. All the Walter Hussey [*Dean of Chichester 1955-77, who commissioned works by Piper, Sutherland, Chagall, Feibusch*] commissions stand in that tradition and the danger of not placing Hussey in that tradition is that Hussey becomes an end in himself. Actually Hussey is dead. That era's gone. We have to do our own thing. If it's a trajectory as opposed to a destination, then I think we get it right. The Pre-Raphaelites help us

do that. This Diocese has a long artistic history. In the 16th century Robert Sherburne beautified the Cathedral church and the Bishop's Palace and commissioned the panels of the 'Heroines of Antiquity' which we've just recovered. That's a really significant statement about feminism in the beginning of the sixteenth century in the mode of artwork that I want to lay claim to. In this diocese there's a really significant collection of frescoes, for example at Clayton, that have survived and that says something to me about the valuing of art. And it's no accident that Glyndebourne has developed and flourished here. Glyndebourne took Fidelio into Lewes Prison in the 1950s. How forward looking - a fantastic trajectory. So those are the things that I want to lay claim to, of which St Michael's is a particular deposit and concentration of enterprise... and therefore I value it.

New lighting ...has to be a thing of quality which ..has the capacity for flexibility

Do you have any message for the Friends?

Bishop We, as Christians in the Diocese of Chichester, value what you value in the sphere of the arts that is represented by St Michael's. There's a commonality between us here. We're grateful for your material support in this building which we believe would not have come into existence but for the spiritual vision that we hold and celebrate. And so we need each other.

And finally, can you say anything to the readers of The Flyer about Fr Robert's successor?

Bishop Once the parishes of St Michael's and St Paul's have produced their Parish Profiles, a representative of the patronage body (the charity called the Society for the Maintenance of the Faith) is responsible for overseeing the appointment process. That representative is an experienced Patron who knows St Michael's well and is entirely in sympathy with it as a parish. He has already met parish representatives and he and I have been in conversation, but we do need to move the Parish Profile process forward now.

So do you have any feel for when there might be a new incumbent?

Bishop It might take some time, because the demographics of clergy tell us that over the next ten years we're on a sharp decline in the number of serving clergy in post because the retirement rate is colossal and we're not replacing them fast enough. Because this appointment is absolutely critical we'll take our time to get it right. Rather than just getting any person, it has to be the right person.

Fr Robert valued the work of The Friends. It's quite important to them who replaces him.

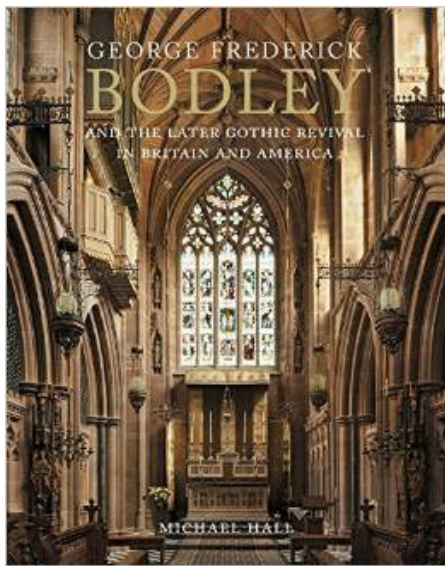
Bishop Absolutely. That's one of the strands of the role that make it so interesting. Although we don't need somebody who's an expert in Pre-Raphaelite art or architecture, nonetheless a person who values that inheritance is essential.

Of Bodley and Burges

David Robson

Friends of St. Michael's are well aware that it's a church of two halves: the lesser church, built between 1860 and 1862 by George Frederick Bodley, now forms the side aisle of a greater church that was designed by William Burges in 1868 and built a quarter of a century later and a decade after his death by his assistant John Starling Chapple with later additions by Romaine Walker. Now comprehensive monographs have appeared to illuminate the lives and works of these two important exponents of the Victorian Gothic. Joe Mordaunt Crook's *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* appeared in 2013 as a revised and expanded version of an early book of 1981, while Michael Hall's *George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America* was published in 2014.

Both architects were born in 1827 and the two monographs treat their involvement with St. Michael's during the 1860s as a mere stepping stone in their long and illustrious careers. We learn from Hall of Bodley's early connections



with Brighton, of his apprenticeship with George Gilbert Scott, his interest in Tractarianism, his friendship with Charles Beanlands, the curate of St. Paul's Brighton who founded St. Michael's, and his involvement with the Pre-Raphaelites.

The commission to design St. Michael's in 1858, one of his earliest, was conditioned by all of these. But Hall, like Bodley him-

self, regards St. Michael's as a youthful aberration, a mere aside in a long and prolific career which would run on for another half century, culminating in a massive cathedral church in Washington. In his account of St. Michael's he describes the ritualistic innovations of Anglo-Catholic worship and the glass and decorations of Morris & Co., but makes only passing reference to the fact that Bodley was supplanted by Burges, sparing not a word to describe the greater church that resulted.

Weighing in at three kilos with over four hundred densely packed pages, seventy of them given over to notes and references, Crook's book on Burges is not for the faint-hearted. It paints a picture of an obsessive artist-architect, an eccentric and extravagant genius, whose working life was dedicated to creating a Victorian vision of the Middle Ages

and promulgating the Early French Style of the 13th and 14th centuries. Many of Burges's grandiose designs for cathedrals, universities and law courts remained unbuilt but he succeeded in creating the Arthurian fantasy of Castell Coch and in remodelling Cardiff Castle, both for the Marquess of Bute, and his churches include the soaring cathedral of Cork. He was also an accomplished draughtsman and a prolific designer of furniture, stained glass, jewellery and silver. In his descriptions of St. Michael's, Crook focuses on Burges the designer and he has as much to say about his decorations and silver as he does about the church itself.

Burges disparaged Bodley as a moderniser who was more concerned with invention than authenticity. Although he paid lip-service to Bodley's early design, he nudged St. Michael's from medieval Italy into northern France, and transformed it from suburban chapel to city cathedral.

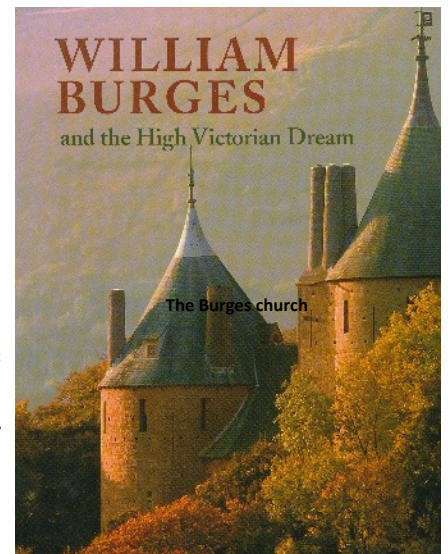
Not unreasonably, the two authors each focus on their main protagonist, leaving us to infer that their two architects, who were exact contemporaries and existed within the same bubble of time and endeavour, had little to do with each other. Neither tries to offer any plausible explanation of why Beanlands should suddenly have abandoned Bodley in favour of Burges or to identify the contributions made by Chapple and Walker to the church that we see today.

Like the churches they describe, both books are rich in detail and a joy to behold. However, they are aimed primarily at serious researchers and do not make for casual reading. If you are interested in the story of St. Michael's then you would be better off buying David Beevers's admirable little guide book (1993, revised 2007) which is available in the church.

Michael Hall. *George Frederick Bodley and the Later Gothic Revival in Britain and America*. Yale University Press, 2014. £45.

J. Mordaunt Crook. *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream*. Frances Lincoln, 2013. £45

David Beevers. *St. Michael and All Angels, Brighton*. 2007



Brighton 1750 - 1820

Dr Sue Berry

Roger Fine learns how revealing wet muslin can be

Sue Berry gave the Friends an immensely interesting and entertaining talk on the development of Brighton from 1750 to 1820 despite the near arctic temperature in the church. As well as outlining the political, social and physical factors which eventually gave rise to the Brighton we know today, she showed us fascinating images of cartoons, maps and drawings illustrating her points.

We learned about many aspects of life in Brighton, in particular the popularity of sea bathing which became fashionable at the time, with the bathers and dippers entering the sea from bathing machines.

The revealing qualities of dressing in muslin when wet led to telescopes for hire on the cliffs above the bathing

beaches. The planting of trees and shrubbery in fashionable resorts was needed to provide privacy, particularly because the bathers had to drink up to two quarts of sea water each time they 'dipped', with unpredictable effects.



It was interesting that Brighton had a sandy beach until the Regency developers moved in and removed the sand for building, leaving the shingle beaches we all know and love (?) today.

Dr Berry delivered a real tour de force and left her audience greatly anticipating her next instalment of fascinating history.

Annual Dinner tickets in demand

Tickets for the Annual Dinner on 19th June are going fast. At the time of writing (15th May) over sixty places have been reserved and a further two full tables are on request.

Organisers Jane Osler and Simon Thompson are reluctant to raise numbers beyond the hundred and ten mark because their main concern is to maintain the quality of service and the unique ambiance for which the dinner is known.

They are concerned that several regular guests have yet to reserve. If you are planning to come don't delay. Contact Simon now (see below for details).

Building St Michael's Malawi style

Last summer your editor was in Malawi and took the opportunity of an impromptu visit to St Michael and All Angels in Blantyre.

The imposing red brick church (1888-91) is a national monument and is part of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod. It was designed by Rev David Clement Scott who had no formal architectural training. No detailed drawings were made prior to construction and the labourers had no experience of this type of building work. All the bricks were made on site from local clay and 81 different forms were used. In the grounds is an imposing old clock tower, newly constructed conference centre and a school which my young guides, Richard and William had attended as boys.

Dates for your diary

Friday 19th June **The Annual Dinner**
Tickets and information
Simon Thompson 01273 733055

Saturday 20th June
3 pm **In Conversation**
Sir Peter Bazalgette
Chair of the Arts Council England
Simon Martin
Writer, art historian,
Artistic Director, Pallant House
£10 on the door with tea and cakes

Saturday in October
3 pm **The Annual Lecture**
£10 on the door; Friends free
with tea and cakes

November **An Operatic Event**
John Cox
renowned opera director

Contact the Friends

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