



fly the flyer

MCHA donation towards West Window restoration

Friends will be delighted to learn that the Montpelier and Clifton Hill Association have made a generous donation of £480 towards the extra costs incurred in the restoration of the Burges great west window, complementing the £11,000 already donated by the Friends of St Michael's.

When the stone repairs were completed it was discovered that the render surrounding the rose window inside was stained and discoloured detracting from the finished result. Furthermore the actual panes had not been professionally cleaned for twenty years. This donation goes a long way to funding the painting of the interior render and cleaning the glass.

Tom Cosgrove of the PCC wrote, "On behalf of the Vicar and PCC may I thank the [MCHA] Association for their valued support. It is with this support, and your own [Friends of St Michael's], added to our own [PCC] limited funds, that we can tackle the major challenge of securing this Grade 1 listed building for the future."

Friends' Chair Chris Dawes said, "It is a most welcome recognition of the importance of these churches and their activities to the area."

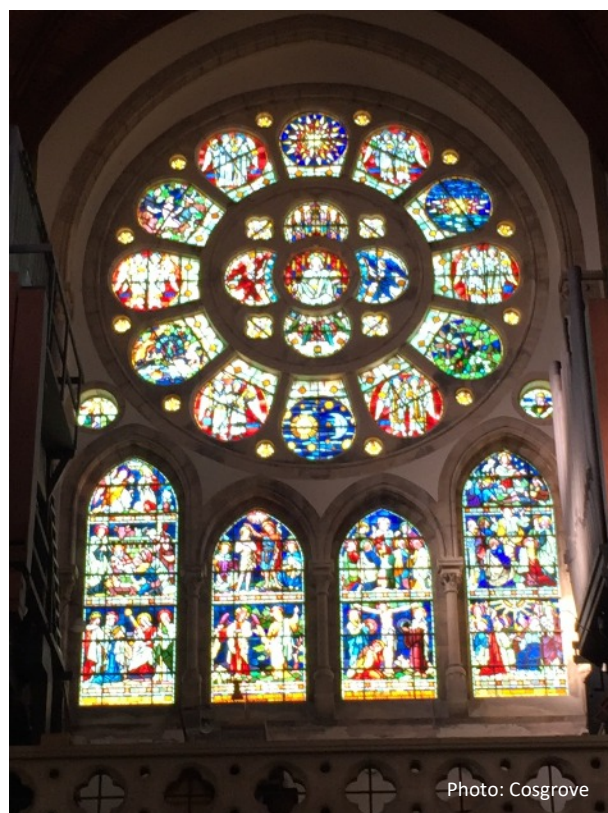


Photo: Cosgrove

Future Friends events in the church

Friday April 21st 12.30
Friends £18 guests £20

The Literary Lunch **William Nicholson**
Screenwriter, playwright, author

Friday June 23rd
£40

The Annual Dinner

Saturday October 14th
£12 free to Friends

The Annual Lecture **Ayla Lepine**

Reminiscences *Margie Nixon in conversation with the editor*

Early days

I joined right at the start. We knew we had a wonderful Pre-Raphaelite church and it would attract a lot of people. And it did.

That was what was so amazing.

I had lots of girlfriends who joined. We had Jewish people, Catholics, non-believers. The basis for the Friends is that it doesn't matter what religion you are. The thing that gives it the strength is that they're so welcoming to everybody and every single person that I know has said that. Fr Robert [Fayers] was very welcoming and charming to everybody.

The church is terribly important in a community and it helps our sense of history. Jonathan Prichard has been the main strength. He's always in the background holding it together and he does it in such a charming way.

So we started the Friends and asked ourselves, 'What are we going to do as Friends?' 'How are we going to raise the money?' It was very important to let the Friends know that the fundraising was not for the general upkeep of the church but for the fabric. We wanted to look after all these beautiful things. It was really important to have that demarcation.

One reason I got involved with St Michael's was the Rev Gerard Irvine who lived next door. He was the vicar of St Matthews, Westminster and at his memorial service I met the Archbishop of Canterbury [Rowan Williams]. I said I became a Friend of St Michael's because, although I'm not a believer I was a neighbour of Gerard. The Archbishop said how important the Friends were. I agreed saying they pull the community together. He was interested and utterly charming and he stayed for the lunch talking to everybody. I really admired him. He was very 'saint-like' and had that kind of empathy in spades. But he wasn't political. That wasn't his scene.

The Annual Dinners

We had a meeting at Ann's [Smith] about holding a dinner. People said we should have caterers but when we looked at the costs there was no point in having a dinner if so because we weren't going to make any money! So I said, 'It's so much easier to do it ourselves. It's really quite simple.'

I don't quite know how it happened but I had the ideas of what we could do. There were eight or ten of us willing to do something. It was fantastic. We had a meeting and I said, 'We must have a practice lunch.' We discovered that idea wouldn't work or that dish couldn't be made for 100 people so it was really helpful. This little team would prepare the starters, another team the main and another the dessert. For the real dinner we all worked together on it because we'd had the trial lunch... and it was great fun. We would put the meal out and then everybody would help out so everyone on the table would have to speak to one other. There's a table host but it's a bit like a family meal. You don't have to have waiters, though you do have to have people to clear. When people arrived I wanted them to have a drink and we did canapés in the early days. I remember on one occasion people arrived early and weren't allowed in. I was furious. I insisted that must never happen again since it's as if we've invited them to our own house – the House of God it may be but if they come early it's wonderful that they're so enthusiastic. Let's give them another drink!

I wanted the evening to be like people coming to my house. I wanted it to look beautiful but I wanted people to feel it was slightly different. Fr Robert was wonderful and Simon [Thompson] who works in the kitchen was very enthusiastic.

For that first dinner we had 100 people at ten tables and everyone said it was just amazing. It was very exciting and magical. It was the end of June and the sun was streaming through the wonderful big rose window. So beautiful. We were seeing the church

in a very different light because nothing had really happened like that before. We had a great response and we had no difficulty selling the tickets.

That's how it started. It's so simple. Everyone's in a happy mood. We know it's a fund-raiser but we're all enjoying ourselves.

Sir Roy Strong

I think one of the nicest dinners was when we invited our Patron Sir Roy Strong. He was fantastic and gave the most wonderful speech. He told us that in the old days the churches were there for everybody. They would even have markets. He was really interested, he loved the food at the dinner asking me how things were done... and he would give you a bit of hot gossip! He was staying with Pauline [Messum] who was a great help with the dinners and very much involved. Pauline said he was the best fun to have to stay. He did the Conversazione the next day and he also delivered the lecture one year and stayed for tea afterwards. We should have him back again. He's so accommodating.

The Ladies' Flamenco Lunch

I think the best fun was the Ladies Lunch. The Hong Kong Tennis Club has a Ladies Lunch and I thought we could do the same here. I have a lot of friends whose husbands have died or who don't like to go out in the evening. They don't know a lot of people or who to go with and I thought, 'I'm sure there are a lot of people who'd like to go to a Ladies Lunch.' When I first suggested it nobody was interested but a couple of years later Jonathan came to me and said, 'Let's do that Ladies Lunch.' We had 110 people and could have sold the tickets twice over. I knew exactly what I wanted..



Photo Tubbs

The Ladies' Lunch 2013

We offered a glass of prosecco and two courses. We had salmon coulbiac and Pauline made a wonderful salad that you prepare the day before and it's the most delicious thing you've ever eaten. I'd been doing Flamenco classes and I persuaded Anna the fabulous teacher and her wonderful guitarist brother to perform a cabaret. After the main course Anna did half an hour's dancing. Then we had angel food cake for every table. A contact in Wales sent me these beautiful edible flowers to put on the cakes. I said to Anna, 'For the second half get the ladies to dance.' Anna and her brother did the second part and then she said, 'Everyone up!' Fr Robert was up dancing. Everybody was up dancing. If you can imagine... the church was full of all these people doing flamenco. We should have made a video. That event was for women but we'd got all the men in the parish to do the serving. We had a raffle and the men came round and did it.

And the fun and laughter. Everyone was having such a good time that they really just threw their money at the raffle. If people are enjoying themselves and they know what it's for they become quite generous. They could do a similar event for men.

On another occasion Gabi [Tubbs] did a Fashion Show which was lovely. Everybody came – men and women.

John Whiteley's Annual Lecture

On another occasion I recall John Whiteley from the Ashmolean Museum came and spoke about the Pre-Raphaelites. I'm mad about the Pre-Raphaelites and I've been to all the things at the V&A. But that was the most fabulous. He knew so much and stood there with no notes. We learned so much. He was amazing. We were going round and found things we didn't even know about. He'd say, 'You see that face there? That wasn't Rossetti because Rossetti couldn't do faces. Somebody else did it.' Also, David Beevers, Keeper of the Royal Pavilion has been very good at doing tours round the church. And of course, Peter Bazalgette from the Arts Council was very, very entertaining.

Visiting other churches

When my husband was alive we always had Simon Jenkins' book *England's thousand best churches* with us when we went away for the weekend so I'm wondering if we could organise an outing to visit interesting churches in Sussex. We could prepare a picnic lunch or come back and have tea in the church. It wouldn't be just sitting on a trip but getting people to meet one another. It would be a really social thing. That's something different and it's learning the history. I'd love to do something like that because I don't have a car.

Future Priorities

If I could make one wish for St Michael's it would be that everything is restored to its absolute beauty so that we've really done something for the next 100 years. It means that the Friends have to keep being strong because that's where the money comes from.

The money raised by The Friends should be devoted to restoring the historical parts of the church. It has its reputation because of the Pre-Raphaelites and that for me is the main thing. There are wonderful vestments, for example but for me they're peripheral. It's very fragile and until the fabric's made secure you just need one big gale... If one of the windows blows out it's never going to be the same again. We'd be losing something that's very precious. I know there are other things that are important, but for me that's the priority.

Final thoughts

I love churches. I've attended Sue Berry's talks on churches, visited the synagogue in Middle Street and the Hawksmoor churches in London and been on a memorable trip to the churches at Shoreham. I would never understand the historical importance of churches on my own but when you have someone who really knows about the history then it enhances your appreciation. Here I am. I'm not a believer but the time I spend looking at churches. You'd better get me on a psychiatrist's couch!

It can be quite tricky organising Friends' activities and things do take time but it's always such fun. I've enjoyed every single Friends' thing I've been involved in. I've certainly got more out of the Friends than I've ever done for them. I've made so many good friends.

Margaret Polmeair discovers little known facts about Brighton, Film and the First World War

It's amazing how our rather bleak church hall can be transformed by low lighting, coloured bunting, and the buzz of conversation. Even more transformative was this fascinating talk on 18 November by Frank Gray, drawing on material from Screen Archive South East. The topic of 'Brighton and Britain at War – the First World War and Film' was ambitious enough but he gave us more:

a glimpse of the early history of cinema in this country and the role that Brighton played.

We all know, I imagine, that the Duke of York's is the oldest continuous-running cinema in Britain but not so many know that Brighton also had some of the country's most important film studios in the years up to 1910.

The First World War was, however, the main focus of the talk: how important cinema was, with 10 million people a week going to the cinema, and with every session including news items or 'Topicalities' as they were called; how government-controlled the news was – only approved journalists and photographers were allowed; and how things changed so that, by 1916, pure propaganda gave way to a little more reality with the first showing on film of dead bodies.

Finally, we watched footage from 'Oh! What a Lovely War', entirely filmed in Brighton, with much of the action in Blythly set on Marine Parade and the West Pier, while the trenches were filmed in Sheepcote Valley. Even now the power of the satire, and the sheer brilliance of the filmmaking are outstanding. And what a joy to see our dear West Pier again, looking so grand.



The Annual Lecture by Simon Martin

Mary McKean

'Simon Martin, Artistic Director at Pallant House Gallery in Chichester gave our annual lecture on the subject 'Bringing modern art into the church'. His talk began at 3 pm and was followed by the most magnificent spread of cakes and remarkably good tea.'

I could have written the paragraph above before Simon's talk and all who attended would know, on reading it, that I had not actually been there, because that is not what actually happened. There was a technical problem with Simon's presentation and quite some time was spent toing and froing in search of a computer which might get his memory stick to work - all to no apparent avail. In the end, the kettle was put on, and, like naughty children who have not actually completed their homework before demanding a treat, we enjoyed the magnificent spread of homemade cakes which grace this annual occasion leading to excessive gluttony on the part of several of us. The tea was pronounced absolutely outstanding by many, so it was in good spirits that we returned to our seats when we were told that the talk was about to begin.

The signs were promising - there was a message on the screen 'Art in the Second World War'. This was a talk which Simon had not intended to give us but which had the advantage of working on his computer, and he offered us a choice between this talk with pictures or the promised one without. We all wanted the pictures - and a very wise choice it turned out to be because this lecture was fascinating. It started with the Paris International Exposition in 1937 contrasting the German fascist and Russian neoclassicist styles and brought us swiftly to the most important work on show there: Picasso's *Guernica* in the Spanish pavilion, at a moment when Spain was fighting for its life against a fascist invasion.

From this point onwards we were treated to a comprehensive and detailed tour of British art during the period immediately before and during the second world war. We saw evocative images of wartime London from Clive Branson, and pictures from several artists capturing the emotion of war including Muirhead Bone, Christopher Nevinson and Edward Bawden. There were William Coldstream's images of bombed cities in Italy, Stanley Spencer's 'Bending the Keel Plate' and 'Ship-building on the Clyde', an image with a resonance of a Renaissance predella. Other echoes of Renaissance painting were traced in the vapour trails of Paul Nash's *Battle of Britain*. Eric Ravilious painted HMS *Ark Royal* and other naval images.

'The Control Room' fascinated Meredith Frampton and William Piper - and the particular role of the electric light in Piper's picture was an echo of the one in *Guernica*.

Women artists included Laura Knight and Evelyn Dunbar. Early work by major names included Henry Moore's drawings of figures sleeping in underground stations and Piper's images of ruined churches including Coventry cathedral. The metaphoric sinister wildness of nature was evident in Julian Trevelyan's 'Harvest Moon' and John Craxton's 'Poet in a landscape with the elements'.

This can only give the briefest taste of what was an impressive tour of this fascinating period in British art. At the end of the talk alas this reviewer had to leave, but Simon continued - and Ann Smith has ably captured what happened next:



And the one that nearly got away Ann Smith

A good number stayed behind when Simon Martin offered to talk through the publicised lecture: 'Bringing modern art into the church' with the help of hard copies, passed round, while he spoke with great ease.

He talked of Henry Moore's *Madonna and Child 1943-4* (in St Matthew's, Northampton), and of Walter Hussey, Dean of Chichester Cathedral who, during his career had done so much to bring modern art into the church: tapestries by Sutherland at Coventry, and by Piper at Chichester - both woven in Aubusson. Glass by Chagall for Tudeley in Kent and one window at Chichester were probably known to most of the audience on Saturday, less well known perhaps is the fact that a surprising number of commissions for art in Anglican churches came from Jewish families.

Gormley for me was the most recent of the artists mentioned and not famous for his work in churches. His 'Transport' is suspended in the crypt at Canterbury Cathedral, supposedly a temporary installation. Chichester didn't get the huge finger designed by Gormley for the nave because the national Faculty refused permission for a permanent installation.

I wonder whether Hussey would have persuaded them.