



# fly the flyer

## ST MICHAEL'S "AT THE EPICENTRE OF 19C MEDIEVAL ANGLICANISM"

### Theme for Annual Lecture by Dr Ayla Lepine

Visitors to St Michael's are astonished to discover such beauty within its plain brick exterior. Yet few pause to consider what motivated the commissioning of such treasures from leading architects and artists of the time.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Church of England underwent revolutionary theological and architectural changes, the legacies of which reverberate today.

Many priests were seeking to replace dull services and long sermons with a return to medieval traditions of colour, music, rich vestments and ceremonial.

Others, particularly in Sussex with its folk memories of the Lewes martyrs, saw this as a papist plot to take the church back to Rome. Brighton was to witness rioting and demonstrations in protest.

Built in the 1860s, St Michael's provided a unique opportunity to test these bold new ideas that brought together the richness of the Middle Ages.



The Flight Into Egypt (detail) William Morris

The result is a jewel at the heart of the Anglo-Catholic movement, whose luminosity continues to provide insights into the unique blend of theology and the arts that radically changed the modern Church by looking to a rich medieval past.

### Dr Ayla Lepine



Is a specialist in the Victorian Gothic Revival. With background in theology and art history, her MA and PhD from the Courtauld Institute of Art explored Anglican medievalism in the late nineteenth century. She has taught at Yale, the Courtauld, and the V&A, and is a Fellow in Art History at the University of Essex. She has worked for the Archbishops' Council, served on the Diocese of London's DAC, and lectures widely on Anglican heritage. Her publications include *Revival: Memories, Identities, Utopias*; *Gothic Legacies: Four Centuries of Tradition and Innovation*, and articles on the British empire, the Pre-Raphaelites, and modern monasticism.

### The Annual Lecture

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> October

In the Church 3.00 pm  
Victoria Rd BN1 3FU

Free to Friends

£12 on the door  
with tea and cakes

# The Flyer talks to Adam Le Clercq

## Organist and Director of Music at St Michael's

### How did you start your career?

I started making music from quite an early age including being one of an excellent line up of boy trebles at St Peter's church, Brighton under the musical direction of Eric Spencer. I was a good flute and piccolo player and became first flute in the Brighton Youth Orchestra where I also won a prize to play a concerto with the orchestra. Paid work for performing, accompanying and teaching started from Michaelmas 1999.

### Any other strands to your music career?

I have set people's lyrics and poems to music. I have sung in choirs with some of Britain's finest singers and have accompanied a number of musicians for performances and exams. I have also worked with Colin Tarn, once a musician for Saga Holidays and a previous teacher of mine from Lewes performing at care homes up and down the country.

### What is your current role at St Michael's?

The church musician role has been melded into one position - there is no Sub-Organist - so my job is both Organist and Director of Music.

### What does that involve?

Preparing monthly music lists, rehearsing the singers each week, playing for all the year's services, coordinating and booking Brighton Fringe each year and the front of house stewarding of those concerts and much more!

### What are the challenges of that role?

There is a good deal more that also needs to be done for things to run smoothly. For example with the Fringe there is shopping for beverages, setting up of concert spaces, moving chairs and the piano into position if needed, lighting, meeting the musicians for their rehearsals, running the on-the-door box office and more. Then of course the church needs to look like a church again for the Sunday morning service. Then we - I! - change it all back again for the Sunday evening Fringe performance!

There are challenges in working with people of course. Working with the choir presents its challenges as you are dealing with some untrained singers and the complexities that go with that.

Fr. Robert and the other staff are absolutely wonderful and working with them is so easy and comfortable.

### What have been your highlights at St Michael's?

Performing with my flute playing wife Nicole this Brighton Fringe - the first time I have performed at the church since September 2012 - was enjoyable and well received.



The huge event from start to finish that the Brighton Palestinian Solidarity Campaign organised in 2016, which provided the church with one very well attended evening concert was a brave and important Fringe event. Over 350 people attended to see 5 young musicians from the Gaza Music School along with the Ori-

ental Music Group. The challenges for the Brighton PSC in getting the young musicians out of Gaza was enormous. They all worked so hard and for so long. Your readers may be interested in the recording of this excellent concert at the church:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7o8Xvsn0rg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7o8Xvsn0rg)

### And your relationship with the Friends?

I was asked to play cocktail piano for the Friends Annual Dinner this June. It was a lovely experience and in the end I played for over two and half hours. It was a pleasure and I was happy to fill the background void with soft piano tones.

I really value the Friends and all the good work they do for the church. We wouldn't be standing without them! For me in particular, the rose window, ever crumbling onto the gallery walls, floor and organ has been challenging and involved me in much cleaning each week. As it is the area of the church I work in I'm very grateful for the Friends contributions towards its repair.

### Any disasters you're brave enough to share with us?

Yes! Falling down some slippery steps and breaking my left collar bone - badly - 5 days before Fr. Fayers' large scale leaving service in November 2014 was not good. How I managed to conduct with one arm in a sling and deal with many singers on the day I don't know. I had to find a replacement organist at short no-

tice and could not use my left arm to play for a few weeks so we also had to have deputy organists each Sunday. But amazingly I was playing again, though not brilliantly by Christmas Eve.

### **If you had a magic wand, what would you change concerning music at St M's?**

Well a little while ago I would have said repair and reinstate the original organ which was dismantled during Fr. Jackson's time but having met its tuner I have been told that it was not a good instrument, with bits held together with cardboard (!) and so not worth it. The digital organ that has been there for over 20 years is actually rather good, although I am still trying to retrieve our antiphonal amplifier from the person who has had it for 3 years as this powers the speakers in the Bodley church.

A choir of musically talented children, women and men's voices would be lovely, to caress our acoustic and singing from the choir stalls and wearing fine robes.

A newer Yamaha grand piano, foldable platform rostrum... The list goes on!

### **How do you balance your role at St M's with your other roles?**

Church is time consuming, especially during Brighton Fringe and you have to balance what you do. We all

## **Festival Fringe Events**

### **Guided tours, classical music and an art exhibition attract over 1000 visitors to St Michael's**

**Guided tours of the church** took place every Saturday and were a great success with more than eighty visitors joining the tours. We haven't held them for several years and it was certainly well worth resurrecting them. Visitors came from all over the country including London, Somerset, Folkestone and even from West Virginia and Vancouver.

The tours were led by Penny King and Mike Laslett and we were very fortunate that the Director of the Royal Pavilion, David Beever, also offered to lead one. We allowed 45 minutes but this was not enough to absorb not only the depth of the architecture of the church but also the history of those involved, the background of how the money was raised and the religious aspects which affected how the building evolved.

There were many comments in the visitors book: *a hidden gem; an unexpected wonderful find; exquisite windows; simply magnificent stained glass; wonderful knowledgeable guides.*

*We would like to offer tours next year to allow people to visit "the cathedral of the back streets"*

try and do above and beyond our job titles, some very much so, though for most of the church members it is voluntary.

In a historical and artistically important church like Saint Michael's one could be there every other day cleaning or reorganising the shelves. So I try and balance my church jobs (I also work as organist at the First Church of Christ Scientist Brighton) with my piano teaching, accompanying, practice and family life.

### **You may not have a signature dish, but have you a signature tune?**

Ha! Well I count myself as a Handelian so I'd have to say *The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*, as arranged for the organ. I actually enjoy cooking and think I'm quite good at it, although I am a slow cook. I'd tend to do something Italian so you'd probably end up with a reasonable lasagne al forno with a green salad and a glass of Barolo. Not sure about dessert - too many to choose from.

### **And finally...**

I will have worked at the church for five years this September. I think I am a pretty good all-rounder so that helps me succeed in more areas of the dual-role job rather than just being focused on outstanding organ playing for example. I have heard Cameron Carpenter - say no more!

**St Michael's is a key Fringe venue for classical music** with around 650 people visiting the church. Many of the audience were struck by the church's beauty wandering around and enjoying the church during intervals; others stayed on to be guided around by our dedicated and knowledgeable team of church-watchers. Several said they will come back on a Saturday to see and enjoy the church in greater detail.

**An exhibition of paintings by Paula Dickinson** was open for three weekends. The paintings, many of Brighton and Sussex, were very well received with over 300 visitors to the church.



After the storm



# The Literary Lunch

**Sarah Mashford**

More than 60 Friends were treated to a delightful Literary Lunch in April. Bathed in light filtering in from the restored rose window and with a celebratory glass of fizz in hand, we had a delicious lunch followed by a most entertaining talk from William Nicholson, screenwriter, playwright and novelist.



We heard about the importance of obsession and persistence in driving a writer to success. It was somehow comforting to find out that Bill had been crafting stories influenced by the world around him since childhood. Starting with *Willie the Worm*, through teenage Bond influenced tales, and at a rate of one book a year, Bill had written eight complete books (all unpublished) by his twenties.

It was clear that he had both the talent and discipline necessary to persevere and achieve major success in screenwriting, plays and novels in a career spanning many years.

His determination to tell a story and get to the heart of what it is to be human shone through and we all now know that the famous quote by C.S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*, "We read to know we're not alone", is directly attributable to William Nicholson.

Bill has two new works coming out later this year: his screenplay for the film *Breathe* (to be released in October) and the latest in his series of novels set in a Sussex village, *Adventures in Modern Marriage*.

There were many questions from the Friends and I'm sure we were all uplifted by his engagement with us.

With huge thanks to Jane, Simon and the team for putting together such a fantastic fundraising lunch.

# The Annual Dinner

**Marisa Linton**

As a newcomer to the Friends of St Michael's I was curious about what to expect, and was delighted to find that the evening more than surpassed my expectations. The church, always so beautiful, was looking its best, with atmospheric lighting to pick out golden angels, Pre-Raphaelite stained glass, and the exquisite ceiling.

The church was packed with people from all walks of life, all talking animatedly. After some welcoming drinks, introductions and time to get to know one another, we were seated at round tables arranged in the nave. Each table was lit with candles and decorated with fresh flowers. Here we were served an extended four course dinner, which had been prepared beforehand by some of the Friends themselves, before being finished off in the church's kitchen and served by the catering staff.

We began with a prawn and avocado cocktail; followed by chicken with asparagus in a lemon crème fraîche sauce, served



with fine beans, and new potatoes; then a raspberry frangipane tart with cream; and, for those of us with space left, cheese and biscuits. The food was uniformly excellent. I especially enjoyed the raspberries and seasonal vegetables, fresh from the market, and perfectly cooked. We then sat back with coffee and chocolate truffles. There was sparkling wine to greet us as we arrived, and more wine flowed throughout the meal.

As a historian myself, I was glad to see such a historic location stirred back into life by the people who gathered there to support it – and enjoy themselves at the same time. Past and present mingled. I was fascinated to be given an impromptu tour of some of the less familiar artistic treasures of the original 1860s part of the church – including that ceiling. Yet the best thing about the evening was undoubtedly the Friends themselves – warm, very welcoming, and excellent company. I met some fascinating people, and I am looking forward to meeting them all again at future events.