



the flyer

‘Everything’s doable,’ says Simon Thompson

Flyer. You’re the current Parish Administrator at St Michael’s. Where/how did you get involved?

Simon: I was first asked to take on the role when the previous administrator left and worked there for three years, whilst continuing my freelance work. In 2016 I stepped in again and have been here in the role since.

F. How did you start your career?

S. I wouldn’t really say I had a career plan. Having read Theology at Bristol, I returned to London for postgraduate study at the Christie’s Centre for Victorian Art and Architecture at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College.

F. What other strands to your career have you had?

S. To support my studies I was working for a party planners and the antisocial hours meant I didn’t complete them. I subsequently volunteered in an inner London primary school in the early years department before taking a paid position as a teaching assistant. I wavered over doing a PGCE but didn’t want to get into student debt, and by chance was offered a job running the Art Atelier in a Montessori School in Paris before moving to another international school in Paris to work in the kindergarten. I left to come back to study interior design at Chelsea College of Art and Design. Subsequently I worked freelance on design projects and as a private events organiser.



Preparing the flowers for Mothering Sunday

F. What is your role at St M’s?

S. All things that relate to the day to day administrative running of the Church, supporting the clergy and wardens. That involves hall book-

ings, diocesan returns, service sheets, finances, church registers... you name it.

F. What are the challenges of that role?

S. Making sure you're on the ball and keeping a friendly and positive outlook.

F. Can you tell us something about your involvement with the Friends.

S. I first got involved when there was just the Annual Lecture, helping out with the teas. Then the Friends was relaunched and I was asked to be part of an events group which has seen the Friends grow in membership and in the variety and amount of functions they host.

F. You're heavily involved in the catering for Friends' events. What does that entail?

S. The catering is an operation in planning, ensuring the food is delicious and of the best quality and that the atmosphere is convivial, welcoming and fun. Due to a diary mishap, last year's dinner was the first I didn't attend but I helped the great team that consistently manages to deliver. The planning for this year's dinner on June 21st is already underway.



Apprentice snowflake maker with Alexia

F. Can you tell us a little about the wreathmaking sessions you run for the Friends.

S. I was working for a contemporary art dealer when the financial crash happened and didn't have as much work so enrolled on a floral design course. Early every Monday morning the students were at New Covent Garden Market with a tiny budget for the three projects that had to be presented that day, so invariably a few of us would end up seeing what the wholesalers had chucked out in the bins which we could utilise. It was a very intense (and smelly) year and a great learning curve. After attending a private course at Gabi Tubbs's in wreathmaking one Christmas and having built up a

relationship with the wholesalers at Hollingbury and being responsible for St M's flowers, I persuaded the Friends to offer our annual courses at St M's.

F. What have been your highlights at St M's and, in particular with the Friends?

S. The 150th anniversary celebrations at St M's were amazing. The Annual Dinner never fails to impress, as does the variety of talks, concerts and events. The Glyndebourne evening, the 'George and his Giraffe' and 'McQueen' talks were particularly good.



Essential wreath making ingredients

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

S. Have you got room for these?!

Two 8 foot floral displays toppling over at a wedding in London, my inability to pin bone ten whole salmon, being notified that the hall and kitchen were let when I was preparing a lunch for 80.... the list goes on. But everything's doable.

F. If you had a magic wand, what would you change at St M's?

S. Find a way of opening the Church more so others can share the treasures within (and lighting and heating it!)

F. How do you balance your role at St M's with your other roles?

S. By drinking lots of tea in the morning, enjoying walking my dog. My nephews, nieces, great nephews, great nieces and godchildren keep me on my toes as well. And realising you can't do everything so enjoy what you can, don't waste time regretting what you can't.

F. Any other comments?

S. I'd like to encourage people to come along - and any suggestions for future events or help with them are always welcome.

Events for Friends and their Guests

The Literary Lunch

Friday 10th May 12.30 pm in the church

Two course lunch and fizz

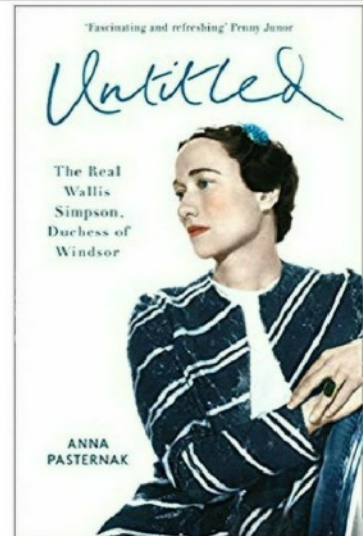
Friends £18 guests £20

Anna Pasternak

Author, columnist and journalist

Will talk about her new biography

Untitled: The Real Wallis Simpson



MOON art, science, culture

An illustrated talk

Wednesday 15th May 6.30pm in the church

£10 on the door or via Eventbrite

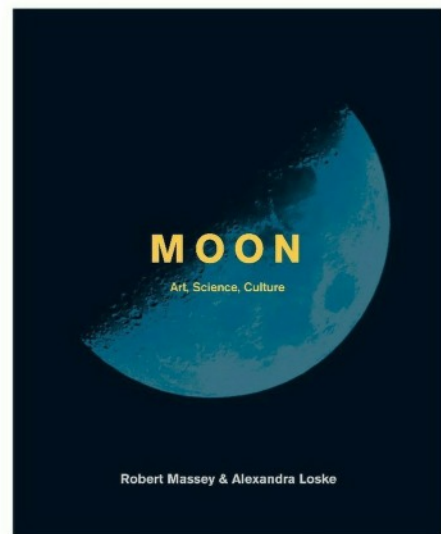
Alexandra Loske

The Royal Pavilion

Robert Massey

The Royal Astronomical Society

Will explore our endless fascination with the Moon with artistic, scientific, religious and practical implications



The Annual Dinner

Friday 21st June 7.30 for 8.00 pm

In the church

£40



Decorating Doors

Simon Thompson is indefatigable, it seems

Simon Thompson is indefatigable, it seems.

Each year in early December he organises a series of wreath-making sessions for the Friends. He greets us all warmly, serves us coffee, mince pies and prosecco, sources all the equipment (moss, greenery, flowers, cones, dried fruit, ribbons and baubles, wire rings, twine and secateurs), sets up the tables, demonstrates and advises with expertise and ensures there's much laughter and mutual support (no one thinks their wreath is as good as anyone else's). But the one thing you don't need to create a striking wreath in Simon's sessions is great artistic talent. By the end of the session *everyone* will have made an attractive decoration to be proud of.

I've attended for the last few years and have been really struck by how very different the various participants' artistic creations are: some multi-coloured, some muted, some decorated, some sparse, some compact, some free-form... All creations that would grace any door over the festive period.

Thanks to Simon for his stamina, advice and good humour.

Alison Minns



Mmmm.... So much to choose from



Total concentration while Simon makes the coffee



One project completed

The Warmth of Friendship

Alison Minns at the Icicles Party

It might not be everyone's cup of tea (or glass of mulled wine), but a great Friends' tradition is to meet for an Icicles Party in the somewhat chilly church in the depths of winter. This year the previous night's snow had melted but it took determination to turn out on what was, weatherwise, an inhospitable night.

Having walked to the church, however I was toasty warm and even threw caution to the winds and discarded my coat and hat.

In the stunning church decorated with spangles and snowflakes those hardy Friends made of true grit and stern stuff were served mulled wine, hot soup and delicious warm nibbles (many homemade), all accompanied by a hefty helping of warm friendship.

It's good to have such a lively network of friends/Friends and to raise money for the church in such a convivial way.

Thanks to all concerned for warming the cockles of our hearts.



Gabi organised the evening with characteristic flair



Friends came together to create a lively festival atmosphere



A winter's tale

Nicola Coleby

On a Friday evening in the depths of winter, Dr Alexandra Loske captivated a full house of friends and guests at St Michael's with a fascinating and insightful talk about her recently published book, *111 Places in Brighton and Lewes That You Shouldn't Miss*. The book appeared last spring (Emons, 2018), and sales of the publication left Michelle Obama's autobiography in second place as it became last summer's most popular book at Waterstones in Lewes.



she described falling in love with landscapes and the stories that they too tell.

Writing *111 Places in Brighton and Lewes* wasn't a project Alexandra was initially drawn to. David Beevers, familiar to most in his role as Keeper of the Royal Pavilion, had suggested Alexandra when he was initially approached. The book is part of a popular series, and coincidentally, despite the book being for the English market, the publishing house is German, based



Pre-talk reunions

Alexandra's talk on fashion designer Alexander McQueen in the summer had drawn a large audience and friends were delighted to have the opportunity to hear this accomplished speaker a second time. Her unexpected first slide was of a map of post-war divided Germany, a far cry from the 111 glorious photographs in the book. But Alexandra's introduction gave a fascinating insight into her history and what writing the book meant for her. Born in Rhineland, West Germany, she described growing up in post-war social housing with its absence of architectural or historical features, a complete contrast from the fantasy world of King Ludwig's castles and other historical buildings she was introduced to by her father. Other formative influences on her childhood were family visits to Dresden – her father's hometown – when West Germans were invited there on holiday. After the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, Alexandra moved to former East Berlin, describing how time there had stood still. Her interest in what the passage of time does to places and the importance of history, and in buildings, objects and people stems from these experiences, but equally,

in Cologne. The commissioning brief was fairly draconian: the text needed to be short and snappy, with 1,875 characters allowed per page (!), and the writer had to live in the city. A Lewes resident, Alexandra argued successfully for its inclusion, ultimately writing 17 entries about the town. The book also includes Hove and Shoreham to the west, and Rottingdean to the east, ranging up to Devil's Dyke inland. The author was to provide the photographs, but given the extremely modest budget for photography, Alexandra realised she would not be able to commission a professional photographer. Undaunted, she purchased a second-hand Lumix and undertook to photograph the vast majority of places herself, revealing yet another talent through the book's beautifully composed photographs.

The book's target market is tourists and locals, and the publisher wanted interesting architecture and beautiful landscapes but also cafes, independent shops and quirky places, of which Brighton and Lewes have many. The Old Police Cells Museum in Brighton's

Town Hall basement is described, but probably less known to many are the underground air raid shelters under the playground of Downs Junior School, or the fingerprint maze in Hove Park. The publisher also asked Alexandra to pick interesting objects rather than describing whole buildings; so the Royal Pavilion is represented by the Banqueting Room's Dragon Chandelier, while the glorious Rose Window is the focus of the entry on St Michael's. But while Alexandra was given free reign to suggest the places she wanted to include, censorship was afoot: the publisher thought that her description of the Marina as "the kind of marina that Brighton deserves" was a step too far and Alexandra was asked to take it out!



An attentive audience

Among Alexandra's favourites of the 111 places is the iconic West Pier, in its grandeur and desolation; the Chattri, photographed after a long hot walk on a gloriously sunny day; and Anna's Museum at 44 Upper North Street, a cabinet of curiosities created by a

young girl in the window of a bow-fronted house described by 'the still teenaged Anna as "a small private collection of mostly natural history finds"'. One of the last entries in the book is on Pells Pool in Lewes, a Victorian spring-water open-air pool and the UK's oldest freshwater outdoor public swimming pool. Fittingly, the swimming pool library at Pells Pool houses a copy of *111 Places*.

Alexandra's engaging talk was followed by another not-to-be-missed St Michael's tradition, a fish-and-chips supper. Although I suspect Alexandra did miss most of it, besieged as she was with Friends and guests buying copies of the book and asking her to sign it. Also available was Alexandra's second new book, *The Moon* (Octopus, 2018), a history of moon-related science, visual culture and art, co-written with astronomer Robert Massey. Since her talk in November, Alexandra has published a third book, *Colour: A Visual History* (Octopus/Tate, 2019); I feel a third talk for St Michael's from one of our most popular speakers beckons.



The '111 Places' series

Can you help organise Friends' activities?

Many Friends pitch in to help behind the scenes to ensure The Friends can continue to flourish. We need a few more people to join the team with a level of commitment fitting the time you can spare. You might like to join others organising an event: setting up the church or helping on the door or bar

We also have three specific roles to fill

Membership Secretary

Our members are at the heart of what we do.

The Membership Secretary is crucial to keeping Members engaged

Acting Committee Secretary

Working with the Chair to organise committee meetings three or four times a year and take minutes.

Publicity coordinator

Working with the small team who distribute leaflets; contacting local magazines and other local groups;

If you would like to help or discuss what's involved please let us know at:

events@friendsofsaintmichaels.co.uk