



fly the flyer

Alexia Lazou laments Aubrey's brief lives

Aubrey Beardsley, Tate Britain, Millbank, London. 3 March – 25 May 2020
(Temporarily closed until at least 1 May)

At the time of writing many people are confined to their homes, or even rooms, in self-isolation; some in fear of a severe, possibly terminal, respiratory disease. There is an element of pathos in that this is preventing people from visiting the Aubrey Beardsley exhibition at Tate Britain. During his solitary working hours, this young artist produced an immense number of exquisite drawings, with the black cloud of tuberculosis hanging over him. Perhaps today we can understand a little of what Aubrey might have experienced on a regular basis.

The exhibition, which opened in March, has been eagerly anticipated. The last time Tate hosted a Beardsley exhibition was in 1923, and not since the V&A's hugely influential show in 1966 have so many of his original drawings been displayed together. For those who prefer art to sport, Beardsley definitely scored and walked off with the cup for England that year.

Therefore, it seems particularly tragic that an exhibition dedicated to an artist who only lived to the age of twenty five, and who achieved so much in just six years, should be closed indefinitely after only two



weeks. Having been lucky enough to visit myself, I can only reiterate what I have always believed; if you ever get an opportunity to see Beardsley's drawings close up, take it. The contrast between the original work and printed reproductions has a stunning impact, so you can imagine the effect of looking at seven rooms full. Beardsley was famous for his monochrome palette and his cover designs are here shown both as drawings and as 'the real thing'; luxuriously colourful books, rarely seen in the 'flesh'.

The parts with most relevance to FoSM are the first two, 'Beginnings' and 'Le Morte Darthur'. These examine the early works leading to Beardsley's abandonment of the insurance office to become a professional artist. According to his own account, Aubrey visited Edward Burne-Jones at his studio, taking along his sister Mabel and, 'by the merest chance', a portfolio of his drawings. Astounded by the skill in these pictures, which he saw as designs for paintings, Burne-Jones found he could do nothing but advise Beardsley to take up art as a profession.

Aubrey's debt to Burne-Jones is presented through comparisons between the character of Perseus, and their respective interpretations of him. Mantegna is cited as a 'key reference' for both artists. Beardsley's first major commission is to produce illustrations for an edition of Malory's *Le Morte Darthur*, with the appearance of William Morris's Kelmscott wood engravings but without the expense. This one project alone charts an interesting development in Beardsley's style as he begins to slide away from Burne-Jones' medieval grasp towards a more Japoneseque experience. The exhibition has been co-curated by Stephen Calloway and Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, with Alice Insley. Calloway is a leading Beardsley scholar and many of the items come from his own collection. In addition, the team have pulled together a remarkable array of works from across the globe, including one from Brighton & Hove. Following the Tate Britain run, the exhibition is due to transfer to the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, although this remains to be confirmed.



Check Tate's website for updates on re-opening. In the meantime, you can read the exhibition guide, available free online: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/aubrey-beardsley/exhibition-guide>

The large print guide contains all the individual object label text.

STOP press!! Join Tate curators Caroline Corbeau-Parsons and Alice Insley as they discuss the iconic illustrator's short and scandalous career, on a room by room tour of the exhibition galleries, <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/aubrey-beardsley/exhibition-guide>

If this has whetted your appetite, then I recommend the accompanying book, ***Aubrey Beardsley*, edited by Stephen Calloway and Caroline Corbeau-Parsons, £25.** It features seven new essays on Beardsley, as well as a pictorial catalogue, and is a beautifully bound arrangement in black and gold.

Hazel Randall relives the 2019 Friends' Annual Dinner

Photography: David Sears

The stage is set

On the hottest day of the month so far it was for once blissful to come into the always cool interior of St Michael's for the Friends' Annual Dinner. It was our first time at this event, having been invited by a generous friend, and we were amazed at the way the beautiful church had been transformed into an elegant fine dining venue. Being greeted with a glass of bubbly and the chance to mingle with old friends and meet new ones got the evening off to a great start.

The guests are here

The menu we enjoyed was amazing. The starter of asparagus spears with a smoked salmon mousseline simply melted in the mouth. The devilled pork tenderloin was really tender and the prune stuffing and port sauce made it perfect. My husband, who is vegetarian, was equally impressed with his concoction of mushrooms in flaky pastry (his description – he is no chef). I was intrigued by the idea of a Persian pavlova with almonds, peaches and, of all things an Earl Grey tea syrup – not sure I would like this one. It was indeed an unusual combination of flavours but nevertheless very refreshing on a warm summer evening. The wine continued to flow while we enjoyed our cheese and the meal was rounded off by coffee and delicious chocolates.



Annual dinner: the production team

To provide such a perfectly cooked meal and attentive service with access to a full catering kitchen and an easier venue to navigate would have been a feat in itself – to do so in the limited facilities offered by St Michael's was almost unbelievable and must have taken a lot of hard work and expertise. The meal was wonderful but for us the best part of the evening was the friendliness and warmth with which we as 'outsiders' were greeted and made to feel so welcome. 'Friends' is surely a very apt title for this group of people who make such an important contribution to helping the historic church of St Michael's continue its mission in our city.

A big thank you to the friend who invited us and particularly to all those who worked so hard to make it such an enjoyable occasion. We didn't win one of the bottles of champagne on offer in the raffle – but maybe next time. For us there will definitely be a next time.



Apéritifs set the standard



Jane & Simon: production and stage management



Geoff and the front of house team



Paula and Simon back stage

The Flyer talks to Friends stalwarts Jane and Jim Osler

When and how did you get involved with Friends of St Michael's?

We first became involved when Fr Robert Fayers invited Jane for coffee and explained his desire to reinvigorate the Friends. Others, including Ann Smith, John Cox and Jonathan Prichard were also at the meeting and this group formed the basis of the new committee.

What roles have you held with FoSM?

Jane is a member of the Committee and also involved with the Events Group. Jim set up the website, initially using Mike Laslett's images, and also made stands to display some of the vestments for a small exhibition in the early days.

What does being a member of the Events Group entail?

Jane: I'm involved in the planning and organisation of Friends events along with Jonathan Prichard, who chairs the Group, Ann Smith, Judy Irwin, Simon Thompson and Gabi Tubbs. Each event has a dedicated lead who is assisted by our wonderful team of volunteers, without whom there would be no events, so we are always looking for more people to get involved. Thanks should go to Tony Bailey who does the posters and Flyers, Ian Crammond, Cicely Knowles, Coreen Sears and Paula Norbury (amongst others).

Tell us about Friends events.

Jane: We try to plan a varied program of speakers who may have some connection to the art in the church or to the area and also some more social gatherings, like the Icicles party, our fish and chip suppers and the Spanish, Indian and musical evenings. Although the events are in part planned to raise vital funds, we are also conscious of our aim to widen the use of the church for the community and encourage more people to visit and join in.

Tell us about the legendary Annual Dinner.

Jane: Our major fundraising event each year is the Annual Dinner and we are planning to celebrate our 10th anniversary this year on the 19th June *[in the light of*



the coronavirus, this will be reviewed later. Ed.].

Margy Nixon and Pauline Messum started the dinner, organising the event and all the cooking. I was part of their cooking team in the beginning and although I now do more with coordinating the organisation of the dinner the 'founders' are still very much involved.

Challenges of your role?

Jane: The main challenge is finding enough people to help put events together. We have a great team of volunteers and would dearly love to attract more people. It really is fun and there is a great sense of satisfaction when an event goes well and people enjoy themselves.

Events highlights you'd like to share? Events disasters, if you dare?

Jane: It's difficult to pick out individual highlights, as there have been so many, but being waited on by chaps in DJs and seeing the clergy dancing in a conga to flamenco music at the Ladies Lunch was particularly memorable. I am pleased to say we have not had any real disasters, problems yes, but nothing insurmountable. The delivery of 10 instead of 60 salmon steaks on the morning of the Literary Lunch last year was a testing time, but we managed to find enough for our guests from various local suppliers.

F to Jim: Tell us about the Friends website and what you do.

Jim: When I first became involved the Friends did not have a dedicated website and although I am not an expert in the field, I had set up a couple of websites as a learning experience in the past and offered to build the FoSM website using a simple structure and using photographs provided by Mike Laslett. Currently I post information people send me about upcoming and past events. Ideally, we would have a website manager so it would be great to hear from anyone who may be interested. People are increasingly using social media and it would be an advantage to have someone to set up and manage that for the Friends as this would reach more people and help publicise events.

Challenges of your role?

Jim: It is mostly a pleasure. My professional work was very cognitive, so I have en-

joyed the practical aspects of making things, constructing the website and cooking canapés. Since I've retired I've become more involved - mostly as Jane's plus 1.

Highlights?

Jim: We have enjoyed some splendid lectures, presentations and parties. I was one of the chaps in a DJ for the Ladies Lunch - it was all good fun.

How do you both feel about living so near St Michael's?

J&J: We have lived here for more than 30 years and are delighted to be so close to the magnificent St Michael's and having met so many lovely people via the Friends and the local community.

If you had a magic wand, what would you change at St Michael's?

J&J: With a magic wand we'd want more people to come to the church and join us - oh and to improve the heating.

Icicles: a happy occasion

Mark Gourlay

Once again, the end of January brought a beacon of light to the most gloomy time of year, in the form of the Friends' Icicles Party.

This is always a happy occasion as it gives the opportunity both to mingle informally and also to look round the church. There was plenty of drink to keep everyone in good spirits, and delicious nibbles were circulated by Judy Irwin, Simon Thompson and their team. Jonathan Prichard gave a short speech of thanks in his inimitable manner.

A number of those present were reunited in mid-February at the inaugural dinner of our sister group, the Friends of St Paul's, who share the same concerns at that other beautiful church 'down the road'. Father Robert Norbury can give you further information about membership.

Thanks again to all those who made it possible for us to enjoy a cosy evening 'in the bleak midwinter'.



Photo Tubbs



Photo: Sears