



WILLIAM BURGES (1827-1881) – GOTHIC REVIVAL GENIUS

Matthew Williams Honorary Curator, Cardiff Castle

A joint event with The Regency Society

Michael Fisher

Photos courtesy of Matthew Williams

Around 90 members of both The Friends of St Michael's and The Regency Society attended this first joint venture between the two organisations. Whilst enjoying a glass of wine and sitting in the splendid magnificence of the Burges addition to the church with the screen well placed in the north aisle, we were immediately swept up by Matthew Williams's enthusiasm and undoubted knowledge of all things William Burges.



At the outset, we were informed of Burges's humorous wit and eccentric personality, his 'loveable one-off character', his loyalty and, by contrast, his testiness and hot temper when wanting things his own way. From boyhood, he steeped himself in mediaeval art, particularly 13th century French Gothic architecture, and

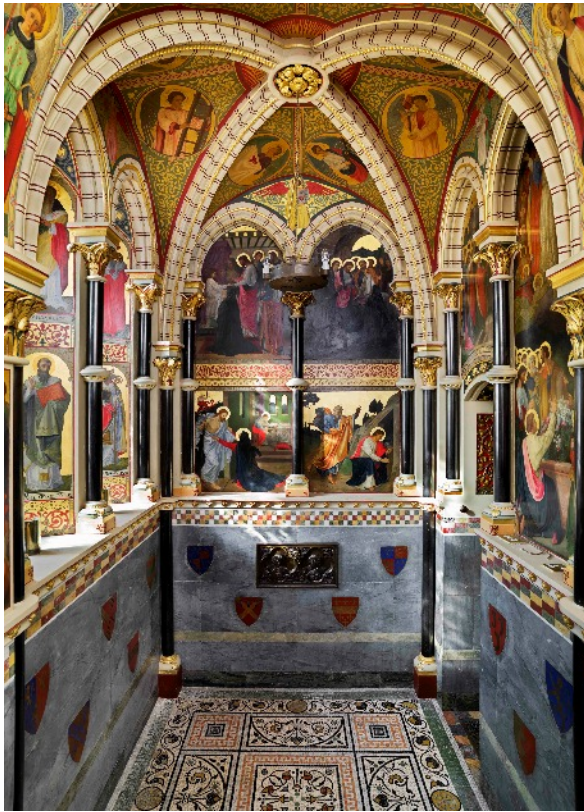
found equal importance in the best of painting, furniture, sculpture, textiles – the 'jewelled blazes' of mediaeval colour and texture. Such was his eclectic passion for this specific period that he identified himself as an 'art-architect' and only accepted commissions and projects that appealed to him.

Burges's young work experiences in civil engineering and architects' practices quickly revealed his maverick nature and hate of being confined. He was happier later when he toured Europe armed with tiny notebooks in which to record wide ranges of mediaeval artefacts and buildings; all giving predominant references to the French Gothic style.



Matthew Williams led us through a range of Burges's early commissions – notably St Fin Barre Cathedral (Cork), the stately home churches at Newby Hall and Studley Royal, and Knightshayes Court (Devon) among others. With each project, Burges's fastidiousness with every detail of craftsmanship, the use of only the best quality materials, the need to satisfy his 'flights of fancy', and his insistence on employing the time-consuming design processes from model to finished artefact, caused his

patrons much alarm due to spiralling astronomical costs. Some schemes had to be curtailed and, not least, he was fired from Knightshayes Court half-way through the commission when the family found his visionary plans for the interior rooms too overwhelming and costly.



Burges's career flourished to new heights after he was commissioned by the 3rd Marquess of Bute to transform Cardiff Castle, and later Castell Coch. His whimsical and innovative designs for these commissions were underpinned by an intensive knowledge of medievalism, symbolism and Gothicism, together with his contrasting passion for Moorish and near and Far Eastern influences. As we were guided through his insistence on 'the complete vision', the interior and exterior images on the screen provided a kaleidoscope of marriages between metalwork, stained glass, pottery, tex-

tiles, carvings, furniture, jewellery – an endless list!

In conclusion, our attention was drawn to Burges's few domestic commissions, in particular his own home – Tower House in Kensington. This building proved to be highly influential and the epitome of mid-Victorian Gothic Revival domestic architecture. However, after his death in 1881, and despite his highly regarded reputation, Gothic Revival fell quickly into decline. It became outdated, ignored, altered and demolished only to rise phoenix-like in the mid-20th century by the few influential cognoscenti who recognised Burges's colossal contribution to Victorian architecture.

Unsurprisingly, Matthew Williams received well-deserved applause and votes of thanks after concluding his absorbing illustrated talk.

Michael Fisher



Narrative Space: My Designs For Opera

Gary McCann

Jane Lewis Peckham

Photos Gary McCann

What a treat! We were charmed, stimulated and enthused. So enthused, that members of the large audience continued to quiz Gary well after his talk finished.

One questioner asked Gary which operas he would like to work on. '*Der Ring des Nibelungen*' was his reply – not surprising given that his opera obsession began when he first heard Wagner's music... at the age of seven!



The German master's influence runs deep. *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the integration of art forms, was a key principle for Wagner. It now guides Gary's work.

Gary considers that power, sex and religion are the mainstays of opera. He treated us to an array of examples showing how he has dealt with these themes – from Rimsky-KKorsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* in Santa Fe to *Tosca* in Poland.

He explained how he loves to provoke audiences by combining elements from different eras in one production – e.g., an eighteenth-century setting with the cast wearing twentieth-century couture. Designs for Norwegian Opera's *Die Fledermaus* demonstrated this approach.

Touching on a hot topic, Gary told us about his enthusiasm for AI. It is like having a super-diligent human assistant, he said.

He showed us AI-generated designs that had already been built and some preliminary AI-assisted ideas for Glyndebourne 2024. Unfortunately, the production in question had not yet been officially announced... Let's just say that the work is by Lehar and is his most famous piece. The designs are stunning and very, very glamorous. I, for one, can't wait to be immersed in Gary's version of Pontevedro!



The Flyer talks to two artistic young churchgoers

The Flyer [TF]: Tell me a bit about yourselves.

Marie LeClercq: I am 11 years old. My dad, Adam is the Director of Music and Organist at St Michael's and my mother, Nicole is on the children's toys stall at today's church Christmas Fair. She plays the flute and also runs the Little Angels play-group that's been going for nearly seven years now. It's a drop-in group for ages 0-5 held in the church hall every Wednesday morning from 9.30-11.00.

Myles LeClercq: I'm Marie's brother and I'm seven.

TF: Do you come to St Michael's often?

Marie: Yes. We come every week and attend the Treasure Seekers Sunday School that Simon [Simon Thompson – Parish Administrator] runs here in the church hall. Our mum helps him.

TF: What do you like about Sunday School?

Myles: I like the pencils and the paints. I also like baking. I love the play cupboard. I have a dinosaur costume that I wear almost every week. I like riding the toy motorbike and playing the drum. [He fetches the drum and plays it. He has a little way to go before he reaches his parents' musical prowess].

TF: Why do you like the drum so much?

Myles: Because it's loud.

TF: Marie, are you musical?

Marie: I play the flute and the piano. We sometimes come to concerts in the church during Brighton Festival. I remember one by Sally Beamish and also one in aid of Ukraine.

TF: What do you specially like about St Michael's?

Marie: I like coming here because it's fun. I'm hoping to be a server here one day. I really like the stained glass, particularly the windows in the west end. They're a bit hard to make out but they're so colourful. [The Bodley west windows are by William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Brown. The Burges west window is by William Worrell from the designs of W H Lonsdale].

TF: We're looking at two wonderful collages here on the wall in the church hall that I believe you helped to create. Tell me about them.



Marie: We made them with Simon in Sunday School. One is St Michael and one is Our Lady of Walsingham. We brought in old magazines and fabrics and cut them up. It took us about four or five weeks and there were about four or six of us each week. I really like Our Lady's veil.

TF: They're splendid. I am impressed by Our Lady's colourful dress. Let's go back into the church. Have you seen the wooden barber frog shaving another frog? [One of 12 wonderfully quirky misericords in the Choir stalls carved in walnut by William Nicholls, who is said to have been Burges's 'favourite craftsman'.]

Marie: No.

TF: I'll show you...

Marie and Myles's mother, **Nicole** adds: Marie and Myles both enjoy the friendly atmosphere of the church, seeing familiar faces and meeting new children and adults. They get to learn about different aspects of Christianity with Simon (their favourite adult!) in Treasure Seekers. They often use arts and crafts, light candles and say prayers, sometimes do readings in church, and maintain the lovely wall displays in the hall. They also look forward to the special services such as the Nativity on Christmas Eve. Marie likes helping with the coffee after Sunday Mass, and Myles has the special job of taking the bible from the Priest at the start of the service before the children go in to the hall for Treasure Seekers. They both enjoy sitting at the front of church and looking up behind them to the big stained glass windows and waving to their Dad up there in the organ loft!

The Literary Lunch with Jane Lythell

Sandie Williams

Photos Gabi Tubbs

I attended the Literary Lunch at the beautiful St Michael's Church on the 16th June and was welcomed by Alison and Ian who gave me a ticket for a glass of Prosecco. There was a little bar where it was possible to order wine to have with lunch. I picked a table and joined seven other people. There were a number of tables and everyone was enjoying meeting up. I was surprised how many people I knew there.

A nice two course lunch was served and everyone chatted until coffee arrived when Jane Lythell was introduced. She is a successful novelist who lives in Brighton. Jane entertained us with memories of her working journey from TV Producer, Deputy Director of the Brighton Film Institute and Chief Executive of BAFTA to the Foreign Office for a number of years to her eventual step into her ambition of being a novelist.

She gave us a brief outline of her latest book *The Exes*, which is set in Brighton and showed us the other books she has written, afterwards it was possible to buy copies and have them signed.

It was a happy and informative afternoon, which I very much enjoyed.



Friends of St Michael's Annual Dinner

Heli Setala-Wilkinson

photos David Sears



I have only lived in Hove for some 18 months, after 52 years in London. However much I loved London I realised the time to leave had come and I moved here. I have been extremely happy about my move to Hove – I love the sea, the huge sky and the clouds. I even enjoy being woken up in the morning by the gulls screaming...

I have met such friendly and helpful people here. When I was kindly invited to come to a Friends' evening event at Saint Michael and All the Angels church I felt immediately at home and joined the Friends of St Michael's there and then. As a result I came to enjoy the Friends' Annual Dinner which was a very happy occasion.

It is amazing how versatile the interior space of St Michael's church is. Although the ceiling is very high, even for a church, the atmosphere was warm and intimate, there was lots of chat and laughter around the round tables. It provided a good opportunity for those who had long-standing friends there to exchange news and for those like me, who did not know many, to meet new people. At the table where I was sitting, we were encouraged to change places half-way through. It was a very good idea because that way you could also reach out to those who sat at a distance from you. I think it would be a good idea if this would become a regular feature at the annual dinner.



I thought the menu was excellent and I enjoyed it very much. It must be rather difficult to cater for a large group who are dining in a church – churches being cold and vast places by nature due to the architecture.

All in all, it was a great evening, and I am now looking forward to the 2024 Annual Dinner. Thank you!

