



fly the flyer

Alexandra Loske's fascinating talk on Mary Gartside

Alison Minns

Who would have thought colour blots could be so absorbing.

Clearly around 60 Friends thought it worth missing the delights of the Olympics opening ceremony to attend a talk in the church on Georgian colour theorist and abstract artist Mary Gartside given by Dr Alexandra Loske.

Alexandra got us all on her side with her first Powerpoint presentation which had the subheading: 'A talk to **my** Friends of St Michael's.' She had us hooked from the start!

It's fair to say Alexandra is obsessed by colour (she has written numerous books about the subject, including a recently published 6.5 kg double-tome for Taschen: *The Book of Colour Concepts*.) She is also passionate about raising the profile of overlooked and neglected female artists and colour writers.



Resarching colour theory in the British Library

We were taken through the canon of colour literature – from Isaac Newton's 1704 *Opticks*, Goethe's 1810 *Theory of Colours* (3 volumes, though not as weighty as Alexandra's Taschen volume), 19th-century 'colourman' George Field (theorist and chemist), and 20th-century educators Johannes Itten and Albert Munsell. All men... Prior to 1900 there were approximately 430 published works on colour by men and fewer than 20 by women. Several of these were by Mary Merrifield (a Brighton-based artist and naturalist featured at the Booth Museum).

Gartside's biographical details are sketchy, but she was born around 1755 and died in 1819 in Shropshire, never having married. Sadly, there is no known portrait of her though 11 of her letters survive in the National Art Library at the V&A. She



was basically a flower painter (a discipline perceived as somewhat second rate at the time, partly because it was mainly the preserve of women). Mary taught women how to draw and paint in watercolour. Three of her small paintings of plants were included in the RA Summer Show in 1781, and 'Sherlock' Alexandra has discovered four Gatside gouache paintings in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, which had been wrongly attributed. Gatside identified seven colour groups (plus white) and illustrated her theories with 'blots' of harmonising colours. Her book *An Essay on Light and Shade, on Colours, and on Composition in General* was first published in 1805, with a second edition appearing in 1808. Alexandra has part ownership of a very rare first edition. An indication of the status of the book is that Queen Charlotte and George IV's sisters owned copies.

On Mary Gatside's death a small written tribute was paid to her in a paper, acknowledging her 'scientific knowledge and superior taste in flower painting.'

Since her 'discovery' and promotion by Alexandra, Gatside has influenced several contemporary artists and groups, including primary school pupils in Minneapolis.

Art bookseller Thomas Heneage has recently published a book on Gatside: *Mary Gatside c.1755-1819: Abstract Visions of Colour*, written by Alexandra and there will shortly be an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* for Gatside, also written by Alexandra.

Alexandra was given a bouquet of flowers as thanks (a gift befitting the subject of her talk) and Jonathan Prichard, Vice Chair of the Friends drew our attention to the beautiful colours in the church highlighted by the sunlight. Chris Dawes was thanked for his role as Chair over the last ten years and given a gift. A further glass of wine and a chat with Fr John Blackburne remained.



Autumn and new year events

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| 29th September 4.00 pm | David Beevers Talk and tea members only, limited numbers |
| 22nd November 7.00/7.30 pm | Fish Supper with speaker from Fishing Museum £15 |
| 5th ,6th , 7th December | Wreath-making workshops with refreshments £50 |
| 24th January 6.30 pm | Iceles Party for members and guests |

Further details on prices, methods of booking and payments to follow by email

An interview with Judy Irwin

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

Judy Irwin: I met one of the early stalwarts, Margy [Nixon], over a game of bridge about nine years ago. At the time she was much involved with the Friends of St Michael's. An invitation to the formal Summer Dinner was extended, and thus began mine.

F: *What roles have you held with FoSM and what is your current role?*

JI: I am, and always have been, a Heinz 57 type of person, as are most of the Friends. As such, I do not have a specific role.

F: *What has that involved/does that involve?*

JI: We are a democracy, so our roles can vary from event to event, although we do use our personal strengths, and try to have a different person 'on lead' to spread the load. I have, however, led the winter Icicles Party for several years now!

F: *What have been the challenges of being a volunteer?*

JI: Having been a volunteer since the age of 11, in one way or another, it's rarely a problem. I love what I do!

F: *Highlights you'd like to share?*

JI: Every event has its good, and not so good points. So we support each other in whatever way we can. Being such a great team is, I think, important to us all.

F: *Disasters, if you dare?*

JI: Nothing immediately comes to mind, but hopefully, we learn from any that do occur. We are like swans, I guess. Paddling furiously under the water, but looking calm above!

F: *How have things changed over the years?*

JI: The demographics of both those of us who run the varied events and the Friends who attend.

F: *Tell us about your favourite Friends event*

JI: Without doubt the Gary McCann illustrated talk on set design, particularly opera. A brilliant speaker, with amazing slides of his work and its development in both style and technique.

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

JI: The kitchen, the chilly church: but certainly not my friends within The Friends.



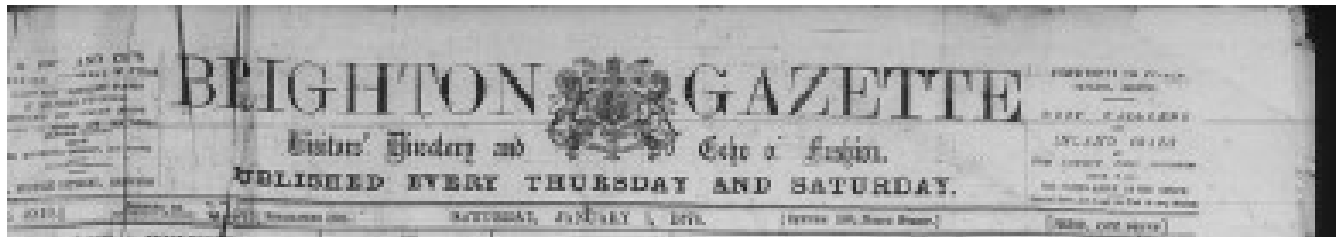
Organising the Icicles party

St Michael's: a Victorian perspective

David Beevers

The article below is an extract from the *Brighton Gazette*, 17 October 1874. The *Gazette* was broadly in favour of Brighton High Churchmanship, unlike its rival, the *Brighton Herald*. In the 1870s it ran a series of anonymous articles on Brighton churches which are now fascinating to read.

The articles cover architecture and fittings, though never in enough detail, as well as interesting descriptions of services and parish life. Needless to say, as the article was published in 1874, it only covers the 'old' church by G.F. Bodley; William Burges's cathedral-like additions had not yet been built.'



Having finished with the Parish Churches of Brighton, we now come to those other sacred edifices, which, while unable to claim the popular places of parochial headship in matters ecclesiastical, still form so large a proportion of the places of public worship in Brighton, and which apply so large an amount of the church accommodation, that, wherever afforded, appears to be eagerly used by the people.

Of these churches, or more properly, chapels of ease, or proprietary chapels, the Church of S. Michael and All Angels occupies a prominent position, though but a comparatively young member of the family. The undoubted ecclesiastical perfection of its interior, the magnificence of its services, the earnest energy of its clergy, and the thoroughness with which everything is done, have combined to render it quite a distinctive feature amongst the churches of Brighton, standing out as it were quite a shoulder above its fellows.

A very large number of persons in Brighton love its services, respect its clergy, and feel that general attraction to the church which many happy hours of religious exercises passed within its walls cannot but leave in their minds. Many thousands, also, who do not regularly worship at S. Michael's hold it in great esteem, and feel that personal interest in its welfare which sympathy with its work, and pride in the high and mighty name it has achieved amongst the churches of the land as a place where God is worshipped with the highest accessories poor human ability can bring to His glorification, must inevitably produce. Also, many people who do not approve of the high doctrines taught at S. Michael's cannot but feel a pleasure in the existence of such an active centre of religious life amongst us, for it is not to be supposed that such a church works good only amongst its own congregation. The influence radiates all through the district in which it happens to be situated.

Its own friends are encouraged and strengthened, the weak-hearted made brave, the cold warmed, the neglectful shamed into diligence, and the straying sheep gathered back into the fold from which they had wandered, or been seduced by the alluring charms of the false worlds' glittering attractions of evil; whilst amongst those opposed to it on theological grounds the same influence for good permeates in an indirect manner, for their exertions are stimulated by the success of what they believe to be wrong, in order that its efforts may be counteracted, and thus all professing Christians benefit by the impulse that such a church as S. Michael's gives to religious thought and religious work.

Hence we are not surprised to find S. Michael's one of the most popular churches in Brighton, one of those best known outside the bounds of mere local knowledge, and one which by its deeds has fairly earned all the favour that it possesses. But we must "cease this babbling," or we shall be accused of attempting to sermonise, a task which will be found much better executed at the church we are writing of, than by a mere unqualified laic such as a writer for the press.

What can churches offer today

Friends reflect

Anon

Concerning the role of churches, I believe churches do have a role in contemporary society, beyond worship and religious teachings, though in recent years the church has in my view missed a trick (closing churches during the pandemic for example). They offer opportunities to bring people together - of all faiths or none, provide a calm and peaceful environment for contemplation. I also think that for many the services seem alien - unless you have been brought up in the Christian tradition the terminology can be difficult to understand. The church is often full at Christmas, so there is an appetite for communal celebration of Christian festivals. Perhaps more could be done to make them more accessible.

At a time when fewer people attend religious services churches could develop their community and pastoral role, providing support and bringing people together. In the modern world and particularly in cities, people increasingly feel isolated, and churches could be more instrumental in creating a sense of community. I appreciate that this requires resources by way of volunteers and understand that past initiatives at St. Michael's (the cafe, Saturday breakfasts etc.) have ceased due to a lack of sufficient volunteers and funding.

As for St Michaels, it would be wonderful if it could be a community hub with arts, music and social activities running alongside religious services. The church also already welcomes other groups to hold events. The Friends already run a number of events each year, many open to non members. While there are a number of Friends who are not practising Christians they are nonetheless very involved members of the parish and part of the St. Michael's community.

Coreen Sears

I like churches. I feel very comfortable in nearly all churches, particularly old country churches. I like the sense of history they give, and as a lifelong Anglican, I feel myself connected in a profound way with all the people who have worshipped in a church, despite differences in churchmanship or theology. So, for me, primarily, churches are about meeting together (as one of the 26% in this country who still go to church regularly) to celebrate the Christian year and worship together.



However, that is not, nor has it ever been, the sole role that churches have played in the past and do play today. Churches are a beacon at the heart of a community, both physically and conceptually. In times of hardship or rejoicing, churches fulfil a role in bringing people together. It seems that you don't have to profess a specific faith to feel that a church building, and by extension, a vicar or priest, provides a focus for the community to mark moments of significance and to supply emotional and physical solace in difficult times.

As to what St Michael's and All Angels is itself for, as Fr. John has requested us to consider, I, as a Friend, find it more difficult to encapsulate. The Diocese of Chichester continually assesses the viability of the churches in Brighton and Hove, both from the point of view of a potential congregation and the financial implications of maintaining these sizeable buildings. We are fortunate that the builders of St Michael's saw fit to furnish the church with beautiful objects which still speak to us now. For many Friends, helping to preserve these treasures is a sufficient reason for the Friends to exist – for others it is the sense of community which is perhaps the prime objective. For my part I see the role of the Friends as underpinning the reasons why all churches are important – as dynamic places where the spiritual, emotional and aesthetic needs of the surrounding community are met in ways that speak to each person. It's not nothing, in today's complex world, that there is a place where people can come together in fellowship and with a wholly positive aim in mind.

Ann Smith

What do I want?

What I have always had:

- a place I can go to in need,
- a place to visit and marvel at
- a place for concerts, talks and more.

What got so many of us who didn't worship very often, were the breakfasts and from that, for me, came 'church watch' and then the Friends because Fr Fayers nobbled me.

And the annual lectures that encouraged many into the building and then you are hooked - more or less.

But breakfast and church watch came from the congregation reaching out and it was a long time ago.



Alison Minns



Churches are places of faith and worship, places of safety and sanctuary, of tranquillity, succour and solace, compassion and consolation, inspiration...

Churches and other places of worship are all around us – part of the fabric of our localities and communities – and yet somehow overlooked. We tend to take them for granted, even if they are just at the bottom of our road. We grow up with the familiar spires, domes, belltowers and crosses. Yet many congregations are dwindling and the church at the bottom of my road has been turned into a medical centre.

Why should we appreciate churches? As an atheist, I am more drawn to the aesthetic aspects, rather than the religious and pastoral roles of the church.

Who could not find their spirits uplifted by the beauty and craftsmanship of so many of our churches, and in particular, our very own St Michael and All Angels. I find its red brick exterior familiar and comforting and its colourful stained glass, artefacts, decoration and adornment exquisite. I feel a sense of wonder and peace when enjoying the intimate setting of the Icicles Party with its twinkling lights and am inspired by the marble and flecked gold of the east wall.

Yet the main reason for me to stay involved with St Michael's is the sense of community and friendship it offers and I think this is true of many of us. I have (admittedly infrequently) attended services at St Michael's and appreciate the sense of tradition and ritual. I chose to have my late husband's memorial service there. The fact that I knew the vicar and that the Director of Music, Adam LeClercq bravely agreed to play some contemporary and complex pieces on the organ gave me great comfort and that sense of gratitude will live with me. Moreover, I was delighted when Fr Robert Norbury agreed to my holding a significant birthday celebration in the church. I felt very privileged to have my friends and family with me in such magnificent surroundings. Having a familiar and friendly place to go is of increasing importance in our fragmented, frenetic and often dysfunctional lives.

Fr John Blackburne has already begun to engage with his community, embarking on pastoral work and establishing links with other organisations. It is the community which is important. Most active churches play host to community groups and activities: exercise classes, toddler groups, concerts, performances...

Only by engendering a sense of community and promoting the beauty of the church will St Michael's remain relevant and vibrant long into the future.