

The Pugin Society

e~newsletter

Issue 26

Winter 2023/24

Peter Paul Pugin at St Francis Xavier cathedral, Adelaide



St Francis Xavier cathedral, Adelaide, South Australia

Photo: Rosemary Hill

Peter Paul Pugin (1851-1904) was the youngest of A W N Pugin's eight children and one of three sons to become an architect. Like his father and many of their contemporaries, he sent designs around the world for buildings he would never see. In Adelaide, South Australia, the first Catholic Archbishop, Christopher Augustine Reynolds, was a notable patron of the arts and an enthusiast for the Gothic. He was, however, as Brian Andrews points out, in *Australian Gothic* (2001) no stylistic partisan. Among his acquisitions for the diocese were fine baroque candlesticks. He had a good eye but no head for figures and overspent his budgets. It was a story of ambitions exceeding funds familiar in both hemispheres and to both generations of the Pugin

family. The additions he succeeded in making to St Francis Xavier cathedral fell short of his hopes but they included five bays of a new north aisle (seen in the centre of the picture) constructed in 1886-87 to designs by Peter Paul, who Reynolds knew personally. A further two bays (to the left) and the west front and the base of the tower were built in 1923-26 and the Tower was finally completed in 1994-96. On a recent tour of Australia, I was impressed to see Peter Paul's strong, rhythmic designs in a tough and assured High Victorian mode - and sorry only to think that he never saw them himself. □

Rosemary Hill

The Pugin Society

e~newsletter

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The copy deadline for the next edition of the e-newsletter is Sunday, 14 April 2024 for publication in May

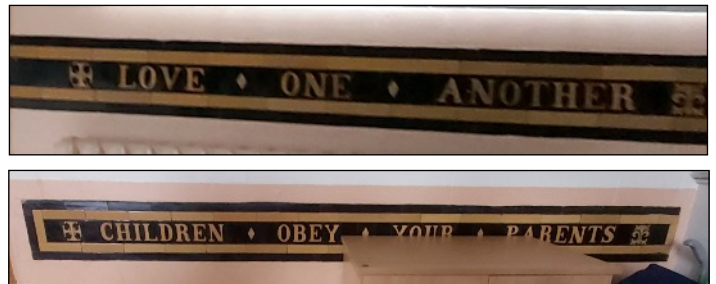
In Pursuit of Herbert Minton

The majority of Pugin Society members will be aware that Pugin worked with a particular group of indispensable associates – George Myers (1804-1875), builder and sculptor; John Gregory Crace (1809-1889), maker of furniture and wallpapers; John Hardman (1812-1867), stained glass and metalwork maker; and pottery manufacturer Herbert Minton (1793-1858), creator of encaustic tiles, and much more.



The school commissioned by Minton
Photo: Catriona Blaker

Wedgwood, and when he died in 1858 eulogies flooded in, both locally and nationally. There is an excellent article on him by Pauline Booth ('Herbert Minton; nineteenth-century pottery manufacturer and philanthropist' *Staffordshire Studies*, volume III 1990-1991),



Texts in the school, so redolent of the period and the Christian ethos prevailing in Hartshill
Photos: Catriona Blaker



Holy Trinity church., Hartshill
Photo: Catriona Blaker

Of these, I have sometimes felt that Minton's life and great achievements (of which his work with Pugin was only a part) have not been highlighted quite as much as they could be. Herbert Minton was a benefactor and a philanthropist and through his drive and creative management built up the Minton firm, started by his father Thomas, to unparalleled heights, vying with, if not surpassing, the great continental ceramic factories of the early to mid-nineteenth century.



Memorial to Herbert Minton in the church
Photo: Catriona Blaker

Minton was a fine man, a lynchpin of the world of Stoke-on-Trent, compared in significance to his eighteenth-century predecessor Josiah



Senior workers' cottages
Photo: Catriona Blaker

an entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography* by Joan Jones, and writing on the Minton/Pugin connection by Paul Atterbury (notably ‘Ceramics’, in *Pugin: a Gothic Passion*, Yale University Press, Victoria and Albert Museum, 1994).

Kind local devotees showed us the 1842 George Gilbert Scott Holy Trinity church (with two Pugin windows in it) at Hartshill, then a village on the outskirts of Stoke, commissioned from Minton, the school he built there, and some delightful workers’ cottages, all by Scott as well. Minton’s own house in Hartshill, Longfield Cottage, is sadly no longer in existence, but even in today’s rather straitened Stoke, one can still feel something of his power and influence.



Another of the cottages. This row was completed by Colin Minton Campbell, nephew of Minton, after Herbert’s death in 1858
Photo: Julia Twigg

Such an outstanding figure should perhaps emerge yet further, and with the feeling that more should be known about him and his background, I set out on a quest to Stoke in 2019, in the pre-lockdown era, accompanied by friend and Society events organiser Julia Twigg. What a day we had. There was much more tangible evidence of Minton’s presence than we had expected.

In the pouring rain we also visited, courtesy of our thoughtful hosts, The Villas, now a conservation area, which was the creation of the Stokeville Building Society - a colony of Italianate houses designed between 1851 and 1855 by Minton’s protégé, local architect Charles Lynam. Here, amongst others, lived Minton’s very important French employee, Léon Arnoux, the master behind the celebrated majolica creations made by the firm.

All in all, Stoke-on-Trent has so much to offer any visitor interested in the Minton heritage, and in ceramics generally. The massive

Minton Archive, once in danger of dispersal, has been saved for the nation and is now in safe hands and in the throes of moving from Stoke-on-Trent City Archives into the nearby Potteries Museum and Art Gallery. The Museum and Art Gallery has first-rate collections, embracing the whole proud history of the Potteries and the marvels it produced. A visit to Stoke is warmly recommended; what’s not to like! □

Catriona Blaker



House in the area known as The Villas, where some of Minton’s important French employees lived
Photo: Julia Twigg

NOTE: A photograph of Longfield Cottage, an attractive rather rambling early nineteenth-century house, the home of Herbert Minton, exists (referred to as ‘Longfields’ on the image) and can be seen on the informative website:

<https://www.visitinghistoryinstaffordshire.com>

Although Longfield Cottage no longer exists, curiously its associated icehouse, now in a neighbouring garden, can still be seen.

Two Georges and a Dragon

It is strange how paths cross, even after 120 years. I had been living in Clapham, London, for several years before I learnt that my great great grandfather, George Myers, had lived at the other end of Clapham Road.

No-one in the family then knew much about him, except that he had been a builder, worked with AWN Pugin and that there was a table [Fig. 1], made by him, given to the V&A¹ by my grandmother, a Myers grand-daughter. Myers' comparative obscurity was to change with the publication of a book about him by my mother Patricia Spencer-Silver² and by the slipstream effect of the *Pugin - A Gothic Passion* exhibition, in 1994.



Image ©Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Fig. 1: Table made by Myers; St George despatching the dragon below

Myers had been one of the inner-circle of craftsmen working with Pugin. Apprenticed to William Comins, master-mason at the Gothic Beverley Minster, near Hull, Myers was employed restoring the Minster's fabric, which had deteriorated and been distorted by Georgianisation, parts of which were normally hidden or inaccessible.

At the earliest stages of his working life, Myers was working on and handling real live Gothic and observing close up how it had been built. His working progression reflected the actuality of Gothic architecture: Gothic came first and neo-Gothic later.

After establishing his business in Hull, Myers moved to London. He became the first-choice builder of Pugin, carrying out most of Pugin's English building projects, including his home at *The Grange*, Ramsgate; all this in addition to a great many other projects for other architects.

Fortunately, it seems that metropolitan custom and practice did not refurbish Myers' gruff exterior and Yorkshire interior. The interaction between Myers and the very different Pugin was idiosyncratic and interesting, especially when set against the usual architect-builder relationship. It shows how substantial differences can sometimes successfully combine, especially when the builder is informed, in sympathy with his instructing architect's overarching

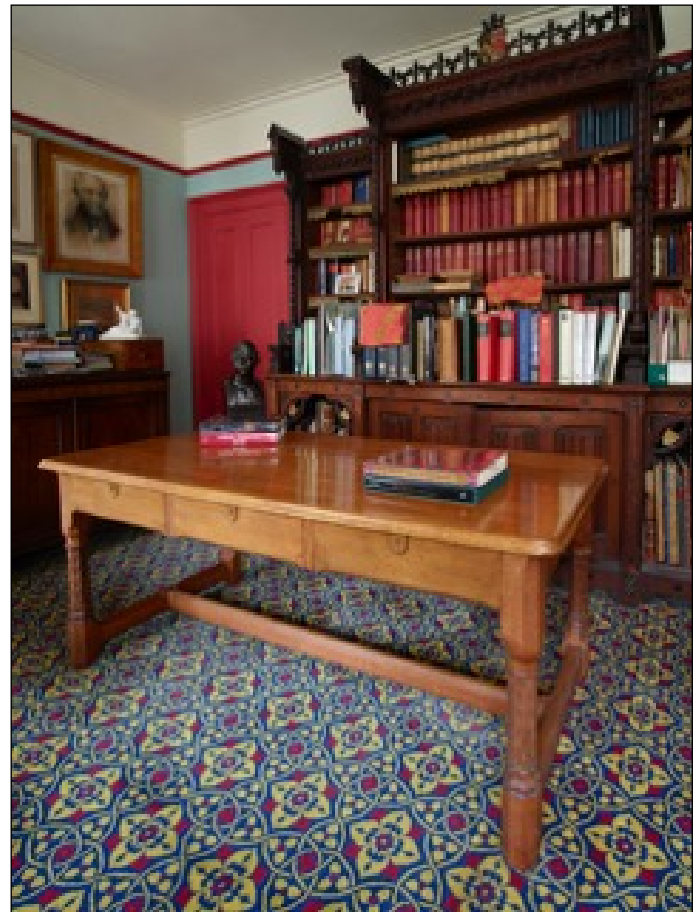


Image ©H. Blairman & Sons, London

Fig. 2: Pugin's drawing table

professional values and, in this case, they share a Catholic faith, less than 10 years or so after Emancipation.

Pugin said of Myers that there was "no greater pig in Christendom... when he takes it into his head nobody can do anything with him" and yet Pugin also described Myers as "a rough diamond, but a real diamond". The real diamond must have won because when Pugin was mortally ill, in 1852, he stayed for a short time at the Myers' family home in Southwark. Pugin was to die later that year and, at his funeral, Myers was a pallbearer and, later, built Pugin's tomb and carved his effigy.

Myers was a carver, furniture maker and sculptor, in addition to being a builder for which he is much better known. The V&A hold five pieces of Myers-made furniture, including a cabinet designed by Pugin for his dining room at *The Grange*.

Over the years, loose furniture can fade from sight and lose its thread of provenance or maker-attribution. For instance, the *Daily Telegraph*³ recently reported the sale of Pugin's drawing table [Fig. 2] by the estate of Clive Wainwright to the Palace of Westminster. Martin Levy acted on the sale and expresses his view that, whilst it is possible that the table may have been made by Myers or by Crace, no evidence survives to allow a firm attribution of its maker.

Built-in furniture, such as staircases, panelling and book-cases, does not present the same difficulties of attribution, especially when it is expressly part of the building contract, as was the case when Middle Temple old library was built by Myers (1858-61). Below [Fig.3] is a photo of the old library, taken in 1917⁴ with built-in bookcases. Also below is a photo [Fig.4] showing the aftermath of WWII bombing taken in 1940⁵ when books appear to have been partially protected by the Myers-built bookcases and alcoves.



Image ©The Honourable Society of Middle Temple, 2024
With thanks to The Masters of the Bench of the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

Fig. 3: Interior of old (Myers-built) Middle Temple Library, 1917 (Arch. H R Abraham)



Image ©The Honourable Society of Middle Temple, 2024
With thanks to The Masters of the Bench of the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple

Fig. 4: Librarian salvaging books and brushing up debris, following bomb damage, December 1940

As for Myers' dining table, ultimately given to the V&A, the focal point is a carving of St George killing the dragon, below decks and positioned at the centre of the structure which supports the tabletop, reminiscent of a Medieval roof support. It is a visual paradox because what would seem normally to have

belonged above Myers' head would, in fact, have been below his roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. Years later, however, some of Myers' great-grandchildren used the area below the tabletop as a playhouse, each sitting within their own triangular space, observed by St George and his beast.

Two leaves were made at the same time as the table, so that each could be added to a table-end, supported by extending arms. This would have been useful because the unextended table has space for six chairs only.

Making a table of his own choice and taking as long as he liked would have been a rarity for Myers. The initials "GM" and the words "Waste ye not nor spoil the products or the fruits of toil" appear in a roundel at the centre of the tabletop and the carved figure of St George is apt; the dragon slayer being Myers' patron saint. This was truly George Myers' table.

Myers' claim that he designed the table is recorded in his will, by which he left to his eldest son, David, "My dining table designed by me". Myers appears to have foreseen that his dining table's design might become contentious and may have used his will, which must be filed for ever at the Probate Registry, to record his contention that the design was his.

The V&A, however, do not agree with Myers' testamentary departing shot and say that it is "Possibly designed by A.W.N. Pugin".

Myers died in 1875, since when - until recently - his proper place in the Pugin and nineteenth-century building realms was largely unrecognised. Myers' table was removed from display at the V&A at about the time that his building works started to gain recognition as a corpus, but either way, it seems that his products and fruits of toil have not been wasted. □

John Spencer-Silver

This article is loosely based on one by John which appeared in the Wandsworth Society's Christmas Number (2021)

Notes

¹ V&A ref: CIRC.356-1958

² Spencer-Silver, Patricia, *George Myers Pugin's Builder*, 2nd. Edn, London, 2010

³ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 December 2023

⁴ Middle Temple Library ref: MT19/PHO/5/1/1

⁵ Middle Temple Library ref: MT19/PHO/5/10/4

Obituary - Michael Alexander 1941-2023

The Society was very sorry to hear of the death on 5th November of Michael Alexander, Professor Emeritus, who had held the Berry Chair of English Literature at St Andrew's University until his retirement in 2003.

A distinguished academic, a poet, broadcaster, a noted translator of *Beowulf* and a specialist in Old and Middle English, he also had a very wide ranging knowledge of literature, writing on such diverse figures as G K Chesterton, Ezra Pound and Shakespeare. His connection with the Society came about because of his book *Medievalism*, first published in 2007. The theme of this very interesting publication is how the concept of medievalism and love of the Gothic (or sometimes Gothick) affected British writers, from the time of Chatterton and Ossian up until the present time. Michael Alexander wove a rich and dense tapestry, in which prominent figures were Pugin and Scott. Of course, Pugin, so central to concepts of medievalism, was the link to our Society. The author saw Pugin primarily through a literary lens, at least in *Medievalism*, this being his field, but also through a Catholic one. Michael Alexander himself was a committed Catholic, someone whose faith meant a great deal to him, and who was educated at Downside before going on to Oxford and then Perugia University.

On a more personal note, Michael was a warm and enthusiastic member and supporter of the Society, speaking for us in London, but also in Ramsgate, in 2018, when my husband Michael and I had the pleasure of entertaining him and his wife Mary to supper. After his visit here it became clear that he very much appreciated the work that had been done to revive and restore St Augustine's, to which he lent his support by giving a talk for the Society and also for the Friends during Pugin Week that year. One felt that he had an innate sympathy for the Thanet sites and their outstanding significance.



Michael Alexander

Photo (detail) courtesy Mary Alexander

I discovered that any conversation or communication with him thereafter was a pleasure. There was always the sense of kindness and humour, erudition, a deep love of, and commitment to, literature in many forms and a willingness to share or impart knowledge or discuss topics in a friendly and helpful manner.

I know that Michael will be greatly missed by all his many colleagues, friends and past students. To his wife Mary, his children and other family members we send much sympathy. □

Catriona Blaker

Communication from Jim Thunder

Gothic California

Jim Thunder, a contributor to this e-newsletter, has donated 1,500 pages of research materials to the University of Washington's *Pacific Coast Architecture Database*:

<https://pcad.lib.washington.edu/>

for incorporation into the database over time. The materials cover hundreds of gothic structures in California erected from 1849 (the Gold Rush had

started the previous year) to 1927 (the year Grace Episcopal Cathedral was begun). They include churches of every denomination, synagogues, cemetery chapels (but not cemetery monuments), schools, government buildings, office buildings, theatres, hotels, and more (they do not include residences). The materials include contemporary newspaper reports; images as designed, as built, and current; and names of architects. □

Information has recently been received from Gracewing regarding the publication of *Heavenly Embroidery* by Gillian Grute, which covers the magnificent vestments and other textile work produced from 1876 onwards by a small group of nuns in Warwickshire. As this book might appeal to some members of The Pugin Society, the information is reproduced in our e-newsletter (see below).

Heavenly Embroidery

Gillian Grute

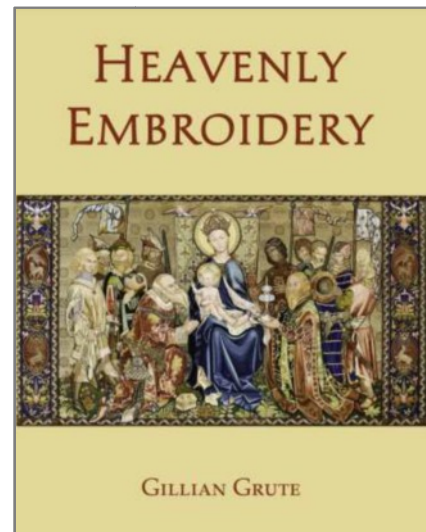
A gift of art prints by the great architect A W N Pugin to a convent in Aachen led to the unexpected rise of an extraordinary embroidery workroom in the rural West Midlands.

Founded in 1844 by Clara Fey, the Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus were devoted to the education and care of disadvantaged children. However, the vestments they worked from the Pugin designs proved so popular that a commercial workroom was soon established in Aachen, with more following at the Congregation's other houses. These helped to finance the sisters' work with the underprivileged.



Exiled from Germany under Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*, the Congregation had to establish itself elsewhere, and in 1876, ten sisters arrived at the small market town of Southam in Warwickshire. Not everyone welcomed their presence, but many became grateful of their orphanage, children's home and school. They were soon joined by five embroiderers who set up the workroom which was later said to have produced some of the most beautiful embroidered vestments in the world. They attracted major commissions for many of the greatest cathedrals, abbeys and parish churches across the country. As well as working with architects and designers, the sisters produced their own designs and created a palette of fine hair silk for each embroidery. Their depiction of hands and faces is exceptional. It was a truly commercial enterprise run by a remarkable group of professionals, despite the fact that the embroiderers often left the workroom to go where they were needed at one of the Congregation's schools or children's homes, or even to work on the Southam farm.

Heavenly Embroidery reveals the stories behind the astonishing creations, giving fascinating insights into embroidery, textiles, church vestments and convent life, and a rightful recognition to the extraordinary work of the Sisters of the Poor Child Jesus.



Gillian Grute has written for needlework magazines and Catholic History journals and has curated an exhibition of the work of the Sister of the Poor Child Jesus. She is a practicing needlewoman.



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