

Pugin Society e-newsletter

Issue 10

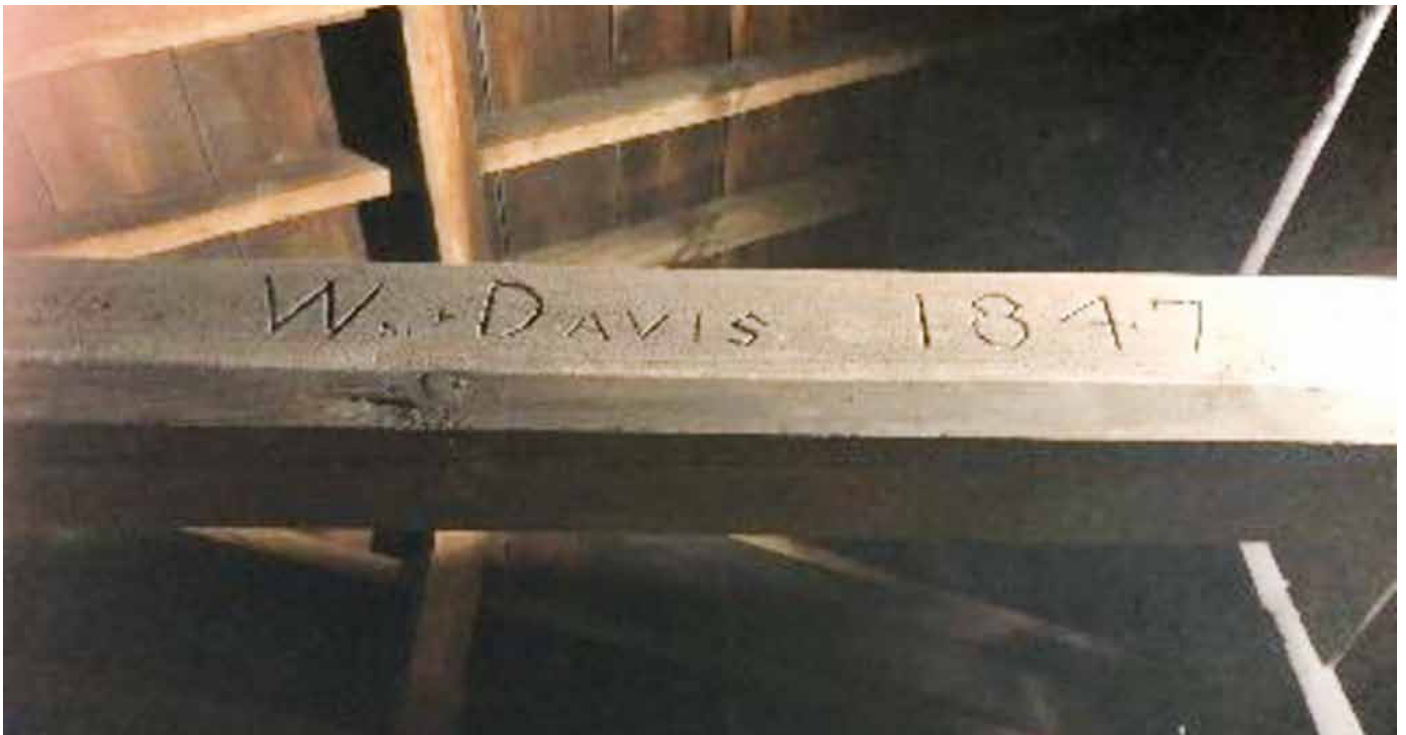
February 2021

A Voice from the Past

John Elliott

In the last edition of the e-newsletter we reported on the items that had been found at St Osmund's church in Salisbury. Some came from a derelict shed and others from the bell chamber within the tower.

A recent architect's survey found that much of the woodwork in the upper part of the bell tower was rotten and damaged by woodworm making the whole thing unsafe - hence the need to remove all that was being



stored there. Work then started on repairing and replacing the belfry woodwork during which the workmen found the original carpenter's mark - 'W Davis 1847'.

It was not unusual for workmen to leave their mark during the nineteenth century, and often in earlier ages. The roofspace of Salisbury Cathedral is well decorated with such marks, a survey of which by Steve Dunn was recently published in a book that I helped edit (Emily Naish & John Elliott (eds), *Salisbury Cathedral: 800 Years of People & Place*). If you are interested, copies cost £15 and can be obtained from the Rocketship Bookshop on 01722 237172. Is there a woodworking expert amongst us who may know of W Davis?

A Word of Warning

While working on St Osmund's in Salisbury it was discovered that the continual use of 'Covid Guard' spray had severely damaged the nineteenth century pews. By catching the problem early it was not too difficult to remove the effects and restore the woodwork. It may be worth checking the pews in other churches to see if they have been damaged in the same way.

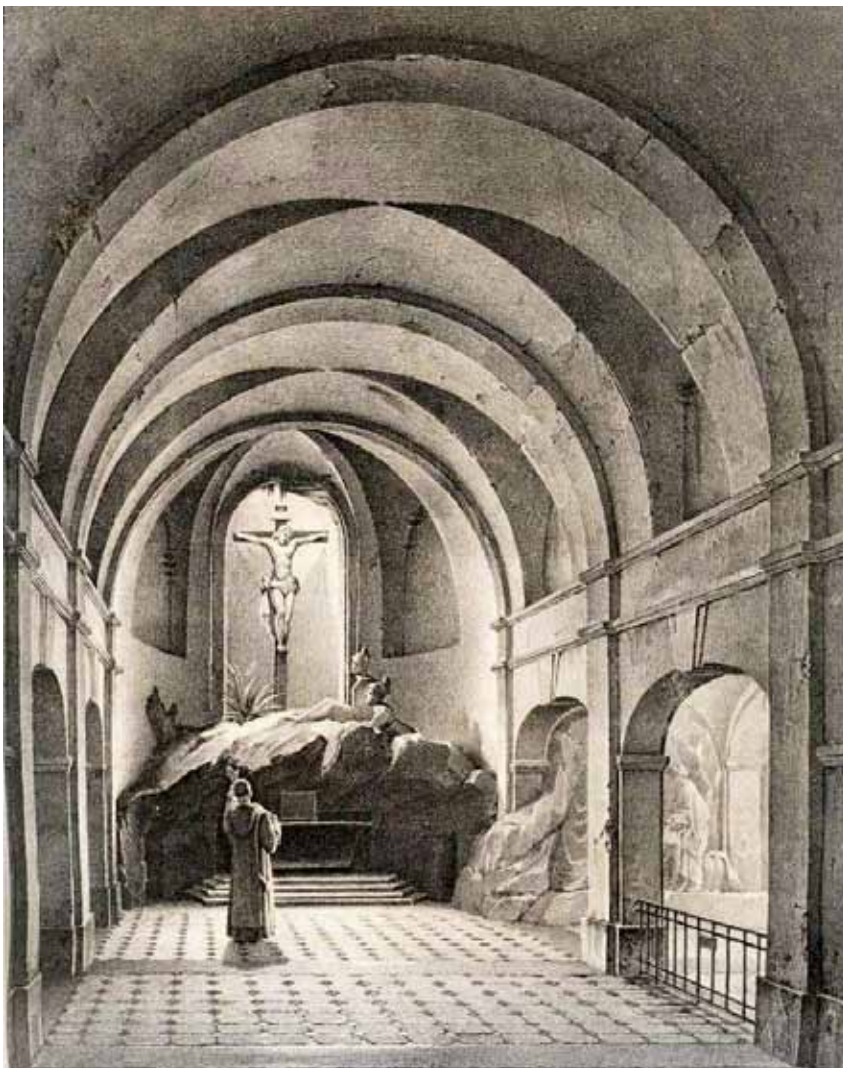
The letters of Catherine Pugin

Stephen Bann

The Pugin Family archive in the Yale Center for British Art contains, in particular, the letters written from France to her sister Selina by Catherine Welby Pugin, the mother of Augustus. Having already transcribed passages from some of these letters in a previous issue of this e-newsletter, I would like to add two more extracts from the correspondence which vividly illustrate the pastimes of both mother and son on their visits to Paris in 1824 and 1827.

As a preliminary, however, it is worth making reference to two other sources in the archive which illuminate the character of the siblings on the maternal side of Pugin's family. Adlard Welby was the brother of Catherine and Selina, and bore the name of the sixteenth-century High Sheriff of Lincolnshire from whom the cadet branch of the Welby family was descended. His letter to Selina of 23 February 1833 shows that his financial position has compelled him to take up residence in the vicinity of Porto di Fermo, an Adriatic port within the Papal States. Though he complains of the expense of making this move, he hopefully anticipates that from henceforth 'it may be very possible to live within [his] means'. Yet he regrets having brought his dogs with him, as there is no good hunting to be had! The main purpose of this letter is actually to offer his condolences by way of Selina to Catherine, and to the young 'Mr A. Pugin', on the death of Augustus Pugin Senior in the previous year. Adlard Welby comments on his brother-in-law: 'I fancy his life has been one more of labour and anxiety than of pleasure or of comfort'.

Of a different order of human interest, though difficult to date, is the notebook compiled by Catherine Welby which carries the inscribed title 'Reflections' (MS Pugin 58). The following brief extracts evidently testify to



Charles-Caius Renoux, *Chapelle du Calvaire dans l'Eglise de Saint-Roch*, after Charles-Marie Bouton, lithograph, c.1827

her thinking on both public and private topics, not forgetting her preoccupation with the disorders of the stomach:

In a discussion of William Godwin's essay 'on the utility of talents':

'What is great virtue but the full execution of great talents?'

On Slavery:

'let us assist in hastening the bad away, and in bringing forward the good, C.W.'

On marriage:

'Perhaps there is not anything a sensible man is more mistaken in, than the supposing he can make any woman, of common understanding, a wife to his mind – unless nature has more than half performed the business by implanting a similarity of sentiments.'

Perhaps In response to French cuisine?

'Of those things, to which we could not recur frequently for our aliment, we should eat and drink but sparingly, when we do, as nature seems to point out their hurtful properties by having given them flavors too powerful, or qualities too cloying, or intoxicating, for our common use.'

The following two extracts from Catherine Pugin's letters that are transcribed here relate to the two visits to Paris that took place in 1824 and



Eglise de Saint-Roch, Rue St Honoré

1827, with the young Augustus expressly taking a role in the first expedition, and implicitly included in the party in the second. To appreciate the significance of the Archbishop of Paris's High Mass at St Roch, which the family attended, it is helpful to recognize the role that this particular church in the Rue St Honoré had played during the French Revolution, and continued to play in its aftermath. The unsuccessful Royalist uprising of 1795 in Paris had culminated in a massacre around the church; traces from the conflict were (and still are) visible on the stonework. Awareness of this bleak historical record gave the church almost the character of a shrine throughout the period of the Restoration. Moreover, the sober classicism of the original façade belies an interior that benefits from an extraordinary spatial innovation. The late 18th century architect Boullée had dramatically opened up the East End by extending it into the Chapelle du Calvaire, whose Crucifixion was made visible through a flood of downward light beyond the high altar. The lithographer Renoux captures the atmosphere of this chapel, complete with its 'ecstatic monk', in his print of the mid-1820s, based on Bouton's painting from the 1817 Salon.

MS Pugin 45 (PO stamp 25 Sept. 1824)

To proceed, Sunday High Mass was to be performed at St Roch by the Archbishop of Paris, and we all went to see it. The Church was excessively crowded, but, with perseverance, Augustus and I made our way up to the railings of the choir, in which all the ceremonies were performed,

and I must say in point of pomp, magnificence and music, they far exceeded any I had before witnessed of the Roman Catholic Church.

Presumably Augustus senior was holding back while his wife and son pressed forward. He is reprimanded in the same letter for not being quite prompt enough in fetching them when she took a walk with her son in the Tuileries Gardens, with the result that she was caught in a downpour! Doubtless the artist's professional duties sometimes had to take precedence on the intensive sketching trips that had called him to Paris. Three years later, it was most probably in the company of their relatives, the artist Louis Lafitte and his wife, that mother and son made their expedition to view the spectacle of the new arrival in the Jardin des Plantes that had been the sensation of the summer. The Viceroy of Egypt, Muhammad Ali, had presented Charles X of France with a female Nubian giraffe, who had completed her lengthy journey by walking all the way from Marseilles to Paris, attracting curious crowds along the route, and arriving finally in the capital on 9 July 1827. Unsure of the animal's sex, though evidently not of its favourite *gourmandise*, Catherine Pugin spares none of the details of its unfamiliar form in the letter to her sister dated 25 September:

MS Pugin 49 (PO stamp 1 Oct. 1827)

We have been to the Garden of Plants to see more particularly this newly discovered animal called the Giraffe. The figure of which you may see in any toy shop in England. The animal itself is very curious, it comes from the East and is even very rare in its own country. They have caught two, both females, one the King of France possesses and the other, I believe, is to be presented to the King of England. The one I have seen is taller than any animal I know of, unless perhaps a very tall camel, and yet I understand it is not by some feet so tall as it will be for it is young. Its neck like the camel is very long, but not like in shape, infinitely more graceful, and when he raises it, turning his head to listen to some distant sound, it is very elegant. This is very gentle, what they are in a wild state I cannot tell. Its favourite food is roses. We carried him a large bunch, and when it put out the tongue to draw them into the mouth we saw the tongue black long and pitted like a snake's. It does not seem well armed by nature for defence for although there are some things like horns growing they are covered with hair, and his whole form, descending from the head to the tail is so much so that a person attempting to ride would slide off behind, seems to announce weakness. By the way, the tail is not the least curious part. It is not very long, somewhere about two feet, small in circumference, covered with small white hair at the end of which as if artificially placed is one handsome lock of jet black shining hair gracefully turned into a curl. But the most wonderful thing remains to be mentioned, and which was never seen before, he has four legs, trots and gallops and walks, but in doing so he does not do what all other four footed animals do – lift up at the same time the four legs and the kind of contrary sides, or the two front and the two hind together, But it constantly moves two legs of the same side and it has the most awkward odd effect you can imagine. The expense of keeping this animal is very great. There is first a large salary to an Arab who has come over on purpose to attend it, and his attendants, for dirty work, and after that two cows are kept for the purpose of giving their milk for his drink. This could not be in his wild state but for some reason or other his stomach will not bear the water of this climate. No wonder I have dwelled so long on this subject for the French, who delight in novelties and seek after them daily, are said to have remained longer in admiring this and feeling interest in it than many others for centuries past.

Pugin at Wymeswold

Martin Renshaw

During the course of discussing Pugin's *Earnest Appeal for the Revival of the Ancient Plain Song*, published in the November issue of the e-newsletter, I mentioned his Church of England client, Henry Alford, vicar of Wymeswold from 1835 to 1853, and some of the work Pugin did to restore the church there.

The work was done in 1844 and was in fact quite extensive. As well as the new two-storey north porch, on the side of the church nearest the road through the village, and the lych gate that leads to it, Pugin designed a new font, pews, the nave roof and windows (made by Hardman) and a chancel screen. This screen replaced the remnants of an old one, but it is only a screen; there are no platform, balustrades, crucifix (on the rood, the cross) or figures of Mary and John, or the candles to complete the full ensemble he was sometimes able to persuade his Catholic clients to accept. It would not then have been possible to include the rood figures here because statues were illegal in the Established Church at the time. Even adventurous, 'advanced' Church of England clergy did not dare to include them until almost fifty years later, and even then their presence was still of doubtful legality.

But Pugin did fit out the chancel with stalls and their reredoses (back panels), including six stalls which were 'returned' against the east side of the chancel screen, with simple boys' benches in front of them, in a manner similar to the basically-original ones at e.g. Walpole St Peter in Norfolk. The floor was presumably new, too.

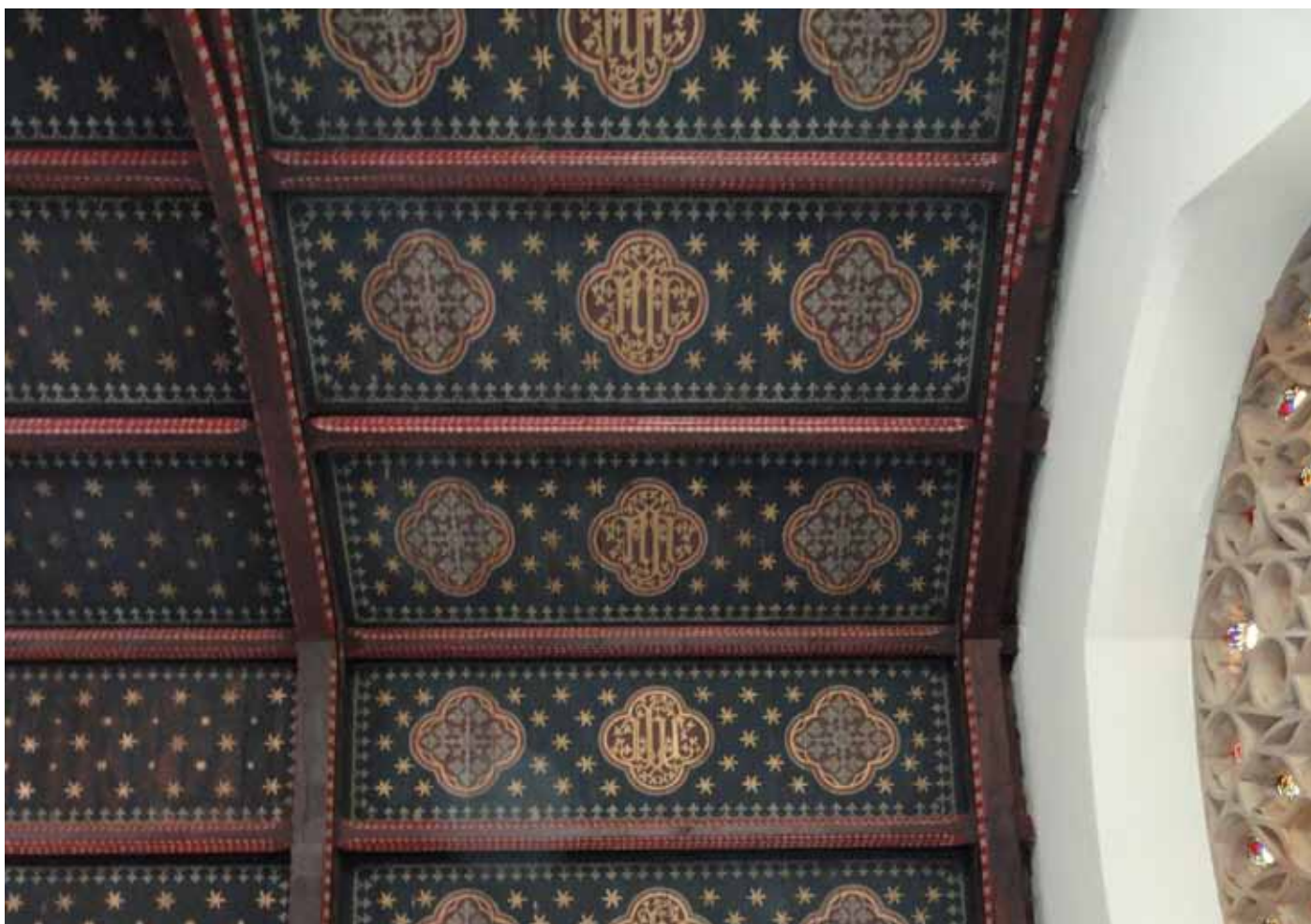
The survival rate of this feature (and its fellow over the rood screen) is very poor, largely because nineteenth century restorers were all too keen to replace original oak roofs that had been ceiled (sealed) with canted boarding with cheaper open-work rafters in imported pine, successfully spoiling the chancel's looks and acoustics at the same time. The contrast of those spindly affairs with this beautiful ceiling could not be stronger. Pugin would have known about celures from his drawing journeys, and it is to his credit and Henry Alford's that it was possible to restore this feature and the painting of the woodwork generally. It is not clear to me if this roof is original or a complete Pugin creation as well, which is a tribute to its authenticity.



Above: General view of the Quire and screen; we seem to be waiting for the Rector Chori to come and tidy up here!

Below: North side of Quire; the organ and its 'chamber' are later additions, and I doubt very much if Pugin would have approved of them; nor possibly, of the heating pipes?





A more surprising feature, not actually illegal because it is never mentioned in canons, is the introduction of a celure, a section of ornamented ceiling over the high altar.

There is more than sufficient Pugin input into this church to warrant a visit, to see what he could do with a client who, unusually for the time, seems to have understood why such furnishings were integral to the design of a medieval church and chancel and the performance of the liturgy, even though the Church of England ceremonies then, fixed since the 1662 iteration of the *Book of Common Prayer*, were far removed from the Salisbury Rite that had been practised in the majority of English medieval church buildings. But they are, as Pugin wrote, ‘some of the external ornaments of religion’ that he was pleased to be able to supply to those he kindly refers to as ‘the members of the separated English communion’.

Let us remind ourselves that the year is 1844. The busy and frequently disastrous first two decades of ‘church restoration’ had hardly got under way, under pressure from the ayatollahs of the Cambridge Ecclesiologists. A host of mostly ill-informed architects were eager to try their hands at building gothic fantasy churches rather than the ‘real’ ones that Pugin had correctly envisioned and re-created. And soon his own career as an architect would come to an end, swept aside by the new captains of industrial church architecture. The aesthetic, structural and archaeological consequences of early-Victorian haste to ‘restore’ are with us still, so Wymeswold stands as a witness and example of what could have been achieved more widely with real knowledge and sympathy.

Notes for your diary

**A. W. N. Pugin birth 1 March 1812, Bloomsbury, London
Death 14 September 1852, Ramsgate, Kent**

Roy Strong's Diaries 2004-15

Joanna Lyall

As a wonderful antidote to the current social blackout I am reading my way through Roy Strong's diaries from the 1960s. So diverting, and one does wonder how he is ever invited back anywhere. He seems to have been simply beguiled by Ramsgate, which I found very touching, and thought you would be interested by the enclosed.

Friday found me in Ramsgate with Clive Aslet. What a surprise that place was, a late Georgian and Regency jewel awaiting discovery, poverty having been the great preserver. And we got into Pugin's little masterpiece, St Augustine's, quite a weird Gothic excrescence in the context of this classical town. But the church is beautiful, double aisled within, with rich and luminous glass, splendid wrought-ironwork screens, an astonishing towering font cover and the statue of Our Lady with a lamp like a silver ship suspended before it. The great man lies in a side chapel beneath a somewhat disappointing lump of alabaster. The contrast with the town could not have been sharper, all those rich colours and pattern and intricate carving. No wonder that Gothic took off after all those decades of classicism. The brother who let us in took us up and around a maze of rooms and into the vestry, opening up wide cupboards stuffed with Pugin silver vessels. What a genius he was! Next door his house was under wraps, being restored by the Landmark Trust.

2005 entry from Roy Strong, *Types and Shadows: Diaries 2004-2015*, published by Weindenfeld & Nicholson. [Available from Amazon for £25 or £12.99 for the Kindle edition. Used copies available from £13.99]

Catholic Converts and Modern Medievalists: AWP and GKC

Michael Alexander

As a robust member of the Church Militant. His militant Catholicism, though well known, was not much dwelt on in the wider recognition of his work that has developed over the last three decades. Catholic Emancipation had come in 1829, and Pugin converted in 1834. His conversion lessened his general influence in those sectarian times – though he flourished as a designer of churches and in the Gothic dress he gave Barry's Palace of Westminster. His churches had their effect on the revival of Catholicism in England, though without the public notice attracted by the career and writings of John Henry Newman. Demographically, British Catholicism was enlarged and transformed by the boatloads of Queen Victoria's Irish subjects who came to mainland Britain. Few of these immigrants would have known Pugin's name.

Pugin maintained that Gothic was the only Christian architecture, and did so with fervour. He also, in the brilliant caricatures of his *Contrasts*, offered a visual attack on the soulless eclecticism of modern urban buildings serving the priorities of modern commercial life, by contrasting these buildings with an idealised view of life in the buildings of the high Middle Ages in England. These 'contrasts' were part of a general rediscovery of the Middle Ages, popularised by Walter Scott, and by Thomas Carlyle, who argued in *Past and Present* that a medieval serf's life was better than that of a modern factory hand. Medieval social ideals also informed the rebuilding of the medieval Palace of Westminster. It is not properly understood that the choice of the style of the Palace was a political restatement, declaring the democratic or consultative aspect – the medieval or 'Gothic' aspect – in which the British government took pride. Tennyson and the early Pre-Raphaelites learned from medieval examples. Later, with Burne-Jones and William Morris, medievalism was stylistic or political, not religious. Eventually, medievalism continued as a source for the decorative arts. Although many of the Aesthetes of Wilde's generation became Roman Catholics, notably Beardsley, this was part of their defiance of social norms. Their art and writings rarely show any connection with the beliefs of Catholics; they were often



Chesterton (left) and friends: National Portrait Gallery 1932.

frivolous, hedonistic, despairing. The fate of Wilde in 1895 put a kind of public full-stop to the medievalism of the Decadents, which was a medievalism only of style. Gilbert Keith Chesterton, who was 21 in 1895, was one of many who found the mock-medieval element in this bundle of attitudes empty and depressing.

At the Great Exhibition of 1851, Pugin was the champion of a triumphant Medieval Revival. By 1900 that revival was on its deathbed. In a curious cultural reversal, from about 1900, a new medieval and Catholic revival was pioneered by Chesterton. Chesterton was educated at St Paul's and at the Slade art school. He became a campaigning journalist. Chesterton's crusade was prompted by his aversion to the Decadent aestheticism, occultism and nihilism which had confronted and confused him in his years as an art student. He was a public debater, most famously with G B Shaw, and his attacks on various modern heresies led him to write *Orthodoxy*. In eighty books he argued for a more Christian society, and this had a notable effect in the first half of the twentieth century, as in many writers who became converts, of whom Evelyn

Waugh is a Catholic example, but also on many Anglo-Catholics, for example CS Lewis and Dorothy Sayers, the translator of Dante.

GKC, as he was known, was like Pugin a Catholic convert and controversialist, though of very different types. Pugin drew to make his case, though he also had a cutting pen. GKC wrote for a living. He did not see churches in terms of their design, although cathedrals were for him an unmistakable expression of the right priorities in life. GKC had a good grasp of history, seen with the English and European confidence of his day. His writing often showed original insight. Pugin was a volcanic doer, who made things happen. GKC was a speaker as well as a writer. He had strong political interests, at first Parliamentary – he was an anti-imperialist Liberal. Later he was a no-party democrat, a Distributist, and an enemy of eugenics. He was a confident critic of Victorian literature, much of which he seems to have known by heart, and he also wrote well about Chaucer and Aquinas and a host of other subjects. He was a good populist poet – as in *The Ballad of the White Horse*, *The Rolling English Road* and *The Donkey*.

These leaders of Medieval Revivals had their faults: Pugin was irascible and made enemies, whereas Chesterton was surprisingly successful in not doing so, though both Thomas Hardy and Ezra Pound wrote epigrams against him. He wrote better epigrams against himself: his comment on James Gunn's joint portrait of Maurice Baring, Belloc and himself was 'Baring, overbearing and past bearing'. He was an incurable wit, who fell too easily into his habit of paradox. T S Eliot found Chesterton's style exasperating, but honoured him as the champion of a more Christian society. Pugin and Chesterton, the leaders of two medieval/Gothic revivals, were joined in a vision which saw the link between Catholicism and a medieval hierarchy of values as not only historical but intrinsic.

For those who have not tried GKC, *The Everyman Chesterton*, with an introduction by Ian Ker, has a good selection of his theological writing and his criticism of Dickens and other Victorian writers, together with some Father Brown stories and some poems, though with none of his wonderful parodies. GKC's *Autobiography* is also strongly recommended.