

Pugin Society

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Father Michael Fisher MA, FSA 1943 –2021 A Tribute

Catriona Blaker

Michael Fisher, who died on April 19th, was one of an outstanding group of Pugin scholars, most of whom were emerging from the late 1970s onwards. He had his own special contribution to make. People come to Pugin in different ways and for different reasons - in the case of Michael it was partly the happy incidence of his place of birth and the locality in which he grew up, his natural love of history and design, and his religious leanings and preferences for certain forms of worship, that made Pugin studies so sympathetic to him.

Members of the Pugin Society will all have their own different memories of Father Michael Fisher leading trips and giving talks to us; I first recall meeting him when he attended a Society study tour to Birmingham in 1997. He was just the same then as he always was thereafter; modest, unassuming and friendly in demeanour, and, when questioned, incredibly informative. This was the start of a long connection - on how many occasions subsequently were we lucky enough to benefit from his knowledge and expertise both as a guide on site, as a supporter generally, and as a contributor to both our publications, *True Principles* and *Present State*.



Michael was born 25th January, 1943, and brought up in Leek, Staffordshire. He recalled the formative impact of his childhood visits to the not far distant village of Alton and the glories therein, created by AWN Pugin and his patron John Talbot, 16th Earl of Shrewsbury. In the Author's Preface to *Pugin-Land* (2002) he wrote 'Setting foot for the first time in the precincts of Alton Castle was like crossing the threshold of another world'; there was also 'St John's church with its glorious altar and screen, the sixteenth earl's coronet still hanging above his memorial ... that atmosphere of other-worldliness has never departed. To enter the precincts of St John's is to enter the minds of Pugin and his noble patron and the eternal concepts of beauty and truth which they wished to set at the very heart of this village community, accessible to all'.



Michael Fisher expounding on Pugin church plate; Birmingham, 2008. Photo, C. Blaker.

And then there was the magic allure of the nearby Alton Towers itself, about which Michael Fisher was later to write so informatively and emotively in *Alton Towers: a Gothic Wonderland* (1999) and where he sat on the Alton Towers Heritage Committee. Michael brought the whole Gothic Revival in Staffordshire to life, covering not just the work of Pugin himself but also, in *A Vision of Splendour*, later revised as *Staffordshire and the Gothic Revival*, expounding on how the Revival evolved in the area, citing work by George Gilbert Scott, GF Bodley and GE Street, for example. Michael was indeed ‘a builder up of men’s minds’, to quote Pugin.

It was always reassuring to think that he was on the other end of the line when one wanted any information about, say, Pugin’s glorious St Giles’ church, Cheadle, or Alton Towers, around both of which he conducted us, and so very many others, at one point or another, or in particular about Pugin’s collaboration with the firm of John Hardman & Co, and the location and identification of Pugin/Hardman stained glass or church plate. But although Staffordshire was his native heath and perhaps his first love site-wise, he was also a member and advisor on Pugin’s St Chad’s Cathedral Birmingham fabric committee, where he was greatly valued for his contributions. His knowledge was not just of Pugin buildings, but also of the artefacts that he created for them – the metalwork, the vestments, the tiles, and more. Eventually, after meeting Neil Phillips, then proprietor of Hardman’s, in 1999, he became part-time consultant archivist and researcher for the firm, publishing in 2008 *Hardman of Birmingham: Goldsmith and Glasspainter*, which gives a wonderful in-depth history of Hardman’s and shows how it was permeated through and through with the work and influence of Pugin, both for ecclesiastical metalwork and for stained glass.

Michael Fisher had artistic talents as well as being a writer and scholar, sometimes attractively embellishing the title pages of his books. At one point he also set up a small craft workshop producing ornamental carving and lettering in Welsh slate, skills which were to bring him various commissions. These were useful indeed, since

after acquiring a BA in History from Leicester University, and an MA from Keele University in 1967, Michael eventually became Head of History at King Edward VI Grammar School, Leek. When he subsequently retired from teaching in 1976, he needed to supplement his income because in 1979 he was ordained, and became a much respected non-stipendiary, or unpaid, priest. Extra funding must also have been assisted by proceeds from his publications, of which there were quite a number, and by his many lectures and tours in Staffordshire, all in the cause of Pugin and allied subjects.

Michael's faith, his devout Anglo-Catholicism, was all important to him and underpinned his life and his particular take on Pugin. He wrote in *Pugin-Land*: 'although I have remained an Anglican my beliefs and outlook have been shaped by some of the same sources that worked so powerfully upon Pugin'; that is, he loved the ancient form of the liturgy and the Gothic style, and understood perfectly Pugin's religious beliefs and the way he designed his churches to reflect them. It was clear, to anyone who saw the live streaming of Michael Fisher's funeral on 28th April, in St Chad's church, Stafford, where he had been priest-in-charge for many years, how greatly he was valued as a priest, both by colleagues, and also by parishioners, and in what affection he was held. And of course there are more facets to his character than those with which we, as Puginites, are familiar with. '*Out of the Noise*': *a Post-war Childhood in a Moorlands Town* (2019), published by The Book Guild Ltd, and written by Michael, gives some clues to these other facets and is a delightful account of his early years. We also attach below a select bibliography of his publications which will give some idea of his productivity in the Pugin field.

It remains for us to thank Father Michael Fisher warmly for all he did to promote Pugin, and for his help and encouragement of the Pugin Society at all times. We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife Isobel, his daughter Sarah and her husband, and his two grandsons, Liam and Rhys.

The Revd Michael Fisher MA, FSA, born 25th January 1943, died 19th April 2021

Select Bibliography:

A Vision of Splendour: Gothic Revival in Staffordshire 1840-90 (1995) Churnet Valley Books.

Alton Towers: a Gothic Wonderland (1999) M.J.Fisher.

Pugin-Land (2002) Michael J. Fisher (Publishing).

Perfect Cheadle: St Giles' Catholic Church, Staffordshire (2004), M.J.Fisher.

Staffordshire and the Gothic Revival (2006) Landmark Publishing Ltd.

Hardman of Birmingham: Goldsmith and Glasspainter (2008) Landmark Publishing.

'Gothic for Ever': AWN Pugin, Lord Shrewsbury, and the Rebuilding of Catholic England (2012) Spire Books.

Guarding the Pugin Flame: John Hardman Powell, 1827-1895 (2017) Spire Books.

Stop Press

A few months ago we reported that the rood cross that Pugin had designed for St Osmund's church in Salisbury had been discovered along with many other items from the early church. The finds were laid out in a church hall, photographed and catalogued but there is now a need to move them on to a longer term storage space as the hall will be needed for gatherings once the Covid rules are relaxed.

The current plan is to store all this material in the crypt of a church in Bath which will mean that it is not visible to anyone. It would be far better if a museum was prepared to take the rood on loan and display what is an important historical item. Few nineteenth century roods have survived, and even fewer can be examined from close range. If there is a museum that would be willing to display Pugin's rood then do email me at jpellott@btinternet.com

For many years Stanley Shepherd researched the stained glass which was designed by AWN Pugin and in 2009 Spire Books published the result of Stanley's work. After that Stanley undertook much further study which was brought to an end by his death. Since then the photographer who worked with Stanley - Alastair Carew-Cox - has been working on the material and plans to launch an online archive later this year.

St Chad's Cathedral

Rory O'Donnell

A mosaic of President JF Kennedy (1968) was used to brighten up the otherwise gloomy approach to the St Chad's Cathedral Birmingham as one negotiated the foot under-passes of the Queensway. The cathedral twin spires can be seen above. The artist was Kenneth Budd. Was the setting intended to appeal to the Irish diaspora of Birmingham? Or to the wider rainbow of colours and ethnicity seen here? I found that I could no longer locate it when researching my recent lecture "A century of Emancipation, the Catholic Cathedrals 1829-1929" - which alas technical hitches presented on the night. Andy Foster - whose *Pevsner City Guide Birmingham* (2005) gives one of the best analyses of St Chad's - omitted it, because it had been removed in the recasting the Queensway road levels. However Andy has now traced it to Digbeth, where it was re-erected in 2013 by the artist's son Kenneth.



Pugin window at King's Lynn, Norfolk

Julian Litten

In his excellent 2009 book, *The Stained Glass of A W N Pugin*, Stanley Shepherd records that the c.1844-5 Pugin church of Our Lady of the Annunciation (St Mary's), London Road, King's Lynn, Norfolk was "demolished, glass presumed lost". The church was indeed demolished, in 1896 only to be replaced by a new, larger, building on the same site designed by William Lunn of Great Malvern. However, the original three-light east window was not lost, for it was carefully removed to the liturgical south side of Lunn's new nave.

The work of William Wailes (1808-1891), it depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary as a throne for her Divine Son, flanked by St Thomas of Canterbury and St George. Interestingly, the Blessed Virgin wears the Star of David, marking her as a faithful daughter of Israel. Below are the arms of the See of Canterbury, the monogram of the BVM and the shield of St George. Above are angels bearing scrolls with quotations from scripture relating

to all three saints. On the end papers of Pugin's diary for 1845 appears the comment "Oct 10. Lynn full 50", recording his receipt from Fr John Dalton, parish priest of Our Lady's, of the £50 for the window.

Additionally, it was thought that the silvered Hardman candlesticks and altar cross were disposed of in the 1960s; not so, for they were discovered recently, together with other items from the Pugin church, by the present parish priest, Fr Peter Rollings, in the presbytery attic, many of which have now been cleaned and restored to the church.



Stapehill Abbey Windows

Nick Beveridge

The former Holy Cross Abbey, Stapehill, Wimborne in Dorset was the home of a community of Cistercian Trappist nuns from 1802 to 1991. The Grade II listed buildings have been redeveloped for housing and at the time of writing the second phase of the development had been placed on the market.¹

According to the Historic England entry for the site² the abbey church was designed by Pugin's contemporary Charles Hansom and built in 1847-51. It was twin-gabled and of two parts in parallel (for lay and monastic use), each with a chancel of two bays and a nave of five bays, and a later north aisle. The southern monastic part was screened off to form the nuns' choir, the west end gable of which merged with a slender bell tower terminating in a tall pyramidal roof. This building ('The Old Chapel') has been converted into two mews houses, one of five bedrooms and one of four.

The Fine & County estate agent's description of the development reflects the Historic England entry which mentions the cemetery memorial cross of 1844 by Pugin, commemorating the abbess Mde. de Chabannes. Also, in his *The Architectural Works of A.W.N. Pugin* (Spire Books 2014), Gerard Hyland includes an attribution.

Surprisingly, neither of these sources mentions the windows in the abbey church which, according to the late Stanley Shepherd in his *The Stained Glass of A.W.N. Pugin* (Spire Books 2009), were designed by Pugin in 1850. He states that there were originally 12 Pugin windows, including a 3-light east window and tracery in the nuns' part which had been replaced with plain glass. The remaining windows included a 3-light east window and tracery in the lay part, six 2-light windows and single quatrefoil tracery pieces in the north aisle and four 2-light windows and single quatrefoil tracery pieces in the nuns' part. One of the latter is entered as "sV – the letters IHC, and scourges". The only other window mentioned was a 3-light west window in the lay part by John Hardman Powell of 1853.

However, according to my observations from online images, two 2-light windows and single quatrefoil tracery pieces on the north side of the former lay chancel have not been accounted for.

Fortunately, all the above-mentioned windows appear to have been preserved in the conversion.

1 <https://www.stapehillabbey.co.uk>

2 <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1154458>



The Life and Works of
EDWARD WELBY PUGIN
Architect, 1834-75



GJ Hyland

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF EDWARD WELBY PUGIN, ARCHITECT, 1834-75

GJ Hyland

The Pugin Society

ISBN: 978-1-5272-9156-0

243mm x 173mm, 294 pp.

RRP £35 (including packing & postage within UK); £45 elsewhere.

Despite the growth in Pugin Studies during the past 40 years, no catalogue of the architectural works of AWN Pugin's eldest son, Edward Welby Pugin, has ever been published, an omission that this book (in the form of a Catalogue Raisonné) attempts to rectify, in the hope that his architectural legacy will thereby be secured for future generations, establishing him as one of the most eminent High Victorian Catholic architects. 287 executed works (both alone and in partnership) spread over six countries have been identified, whose EW Pugin provenance is established beyond doubt. The book organises this corpus of work into 8 categories, each of which is prefaced by a generously illustrated critical analysis that highlights specific points of architectural interest, identifies intra & inter-genre stylistic similarities and establishes connections to the wider EW Pugin Canon; also included are details of 94 commissions that are definitely known never to have been realised. In addition, there are seven Appendices containing background information and a useful summary of the totality of his realised buildings in the form of a gazetteer, arranged according to country and county.

The majority of the realised work is ecclesiastical (or related), mainly, but not exclusively, for the Catholic Church, and comprises places of worship, convents & monasteries, presbyteries and houses for religious communities, colleges & schools (the majority of the latter being associated with parish churches designed by EW Pugin), institutional buildings (such as orphanages), and many minor works, such as designs for altars and funerary monuments. The secular work includes both residential and commercial buildings, as well as additions to/remodelling of houses by other architects.

Detailed architectural information pertaining to each entry, together with supporting sources, can be downloaded free of charge from the website of the Pugin Society at:
<http://www.the-puginsociety.co.uk/society-publications.html>

Orders for the book can be placed at: puginsocietychair@outlook.com

The book is a companion to *The Architectural Works of AWN Pugin*, by the same author, published by Spire Books Ltd, Reading, in 2014.