

Pugin Society

e-newsletter

Issue 1

April 2020

Editorial

Like other similar organisations the Society has cancelled all the planned events and visits, including the reception in the Palace of Westminster, during the Coronavirus crisis.

In order to keep in touch with our members during this troubled time we have increased our emphasis on the written word and during recent weeks all members will have received a copy of *Present State* which had the theme of medieval crosses as well as a lot of news, and the special edition of *True Principles* that was devoted to the works of E W Pugin. This newsletter is intended to provide a further temporary link between the membership and the world of Pugin studies, though it will have a slightly wider focus and also contain articles of more general information.

Because of the costs involved in printing and posting the Newsletter we are making it e-mail based. However, if you know of any member who does not have access to the web and would like to receive a copy, could you either print one and send it to them or let one of the committee know and we will do what we can to help. Details for certain of the committee members are listed below.

We would also like to receive contributions from members. You are the eyes and ears of the Society so you will no doubt hear of Pugin related happenings long before we do. If so please send us the information and we will include it in the next edition.

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Margaret Belcher Scholarship

Margaret Belcher was a leading Pugin scholar. She lived in Christchurch, New Zealand but was a regular visitor to the UK where she had studied in the 1950s. She was an important contributor to the Society's activities but her most notable achievement was the five volume magnum *The Collected Letters of A.W.N. Pugin* which will always be a major research source for anyone studying Pugin or the nineteenth century Gothic Revival.

Margaret died in 2016 and in her will she left a legacy to St Hugh's College in Oxford - where she had studied English - to fund a research scholarship in the field of Victorian Studies, and its literature, history, culture, politics and the legacy.

The Margaret Belcher Visiting Fellowship is a fixed term position for up to twelve months, and it is anticipated that it will be held by an academic who has already obtained a doctorate and is on paid research leave from another institution. Preference will be given to those applicants who wish to pursue the study of a specific research project in Oxford.

The successful applicant will have the use of an office at St Hugh's college and dining rights and will also be supported with additional financial grants towards subsistence (up to £16,000); research expenses (£1,665); relocation costs (of up to £4,000); travel expenses (up to £3,000) and an allowance to facilitate academic events at the college during the fellowship (up to £2,000).

Applications for 2020/21 and 2021/22 are now sought and should be made to Miss Adams at:

college.office@st-hughs.ox.ac.uk.

Pugin's Parliamentary Box

The Palace of Westminster has secured a letter box designed by Augustus Welby Pugin, circa 1851. The wooden box, used for collecting mail ready for dispatch, was designed for the New Palace of Westminster in Pugin's signature Gothic Revival style and went missing over 100 years ago. The letter box has been returned to the collection of national and international significance housed at Parliament.

The letter box was purchased recently at an auction in Nottingham after being found in an outbuilding in the area. It needs some conservation work but is in relatively good condition despite its recent history. It is a rare moment for Parliament's curators to find a piece this unique and to be able to return it to the collection.

Once the letter box has been conserved, it will be added to the Historic Furniture and Decorative Arts collection, which holds a large number of functional, decorative items that were originally designed for the Palace of Westminster. Following incorporation into the collection, the letter box will be displayed within the Palace of Westminster, where the public will be able to view it.



Photo copyright: Nigel Kirk of Mellors & Kirk, Nottingham

When the letter box was designed in the late 1840s, the world's then biggest economy was heavily reliant on the postal service. At a time before widespread use of telephones and the telegraph, the messengers in Parliament were located on the ground floor in the House of Lords. From there they would make frequent trips around the Palace and out into the city to collect and deliver the post.

The letter box is made of oak with iron hinges. It is decorated with the crowned lion of England, with a postman's satchel around its neck on one side of the lid. On the other side it has two curved tripartite decorative hinges; falcons, an ink well and pen, as well as an inscription, are carved in the woodwork. The crowned lion leaves little doubt that it was designed for the New Palace of Westminster and most likely for senior officers in the

House of Lords. The decoration is unmistakably Pugin in concept and style, with his wit and panache shining through.

In researching the origins of the letter box, Estates Archivist and Historian Dr Mark Collins came across a letter dated 27 December 1851. In the letter, Charles Barry, the architect of the Palace, informed Pugin that, “*The drawings for the letter boxes were sent to Hardman as soon as I received them. I have this moment given Crace the drawings for the decoration of the blank lights [i.e. presumably the carved panels to the sides], received this morning with orders to proceed ... I enclose a diagram which he has made of the pannels [sic] and a list of the data for their decoration; and shall be very glad, if it were not be bothering you too much, if you would give the subject your deliberate attention ... That would be most satisfactory*”.

There is good reason to regard the recently discovered box as one of those referred to in this letter. One letter box was presumably intended for the House of Lords, the other for the House of Commons.

Melissa Hamnett, Head of Heritage Collections & Curator of Works of Art, said, “This is a tremendous treasure which has been returned to the Palace of Westminster. I am absolutely thrilled, and I cannot wait for it to go on display for people to enjoy. Our restoration experts are in the process of ensuring that the letter box is in excellent condition, and then we will find a suitable place for it to be displayed.”

Dr Mark Collins commented, “It is always exciting to come across an item mentioned in our archives and especially when it appears to be the only copy in existence. We are still piecing the history of the letter box together and figuring out how it fits in with other Pugin designs in the Palace.”

The above has been reproduced, with slight amendment, from the *Antique Collecting Magazine*.

The letterbox was discovered by Nigel Kirk of Mellors & Kirk who are auctioneers in Nottingham. It had been cleared out of a house along with other items ready to go into a general auction. Nigel immediately recognised it as a piece designed by Pugin. It appears to be the only existing example of a Pugin/Hardman posting box, and it is especially rare for it to have emerged from obscurity with the owner having no idea of its value. It appeared as lot 1009 on 26 June 2019 with an estimate of £500 to £1,000. It sold to a private collector and then was acquired by the Palace of Westminster.

A Passing Thought

What would Pugin have made of the current Coronavirus pandemic and what would he have thought of an e-newsletter?

During his short life Pugin lived through several cholera outbreaks which had a devastating effect on the population. In 1832 he had been unable to leave Edinburgh with his new wife Anne Garnett because of cholera. Then between 17 July and 19 September 1849 over 1,300 people in Salisbury were admitted to the local hospital and almost 200 died. Pugin had bought land for a house there in 1834 and had lived there until 1837. He converted to Catholicism there in 1835 and designed St Osmund's church which was built in 1847-8. However, by 1851 the city had recovered such that vast numbers travelled to London on the newly introduced railway to visit the Great Exhibition.

Might he have seen such an infection as God's correcting hand of a people who had become too interested in money in preference to religion, a theme that appears in *Contrasts*, though his letters are strangely silent on the subject?

Would he have welcomed the internet as a great step forward or seen it as yet another development away from his beloved medieval period?

Pugin's Christening Beaker

This small Gothic Revival beaker was made by ecclesiastical metal manufacturer John Hardman at the height of the first partnership with AWN Pugin. Hallmarked Birmingham 1848, it is worked with bands of engraving and three champlévé enamel roundels of a rose, a fleur de lys and the monogram EP. The engraved inscription reads 'Eleanor Frances Baptised' and the date April 3, 1848, in Roman numerals.

It came for sale at Kingham & Orme in Evesham on 6-7 December 2019 having come by descent from the family of John Gibson, Dean of Jesus College, Cambridge from 1842-57. Gibson was one of the guiding forces of the Gothic Revival in Cambridge in the 1840s and his entry in the Hardman order books (now in the Birmingham Library) includes two private commissions, one of which is this beaker priced at £6 on March 30, 1849.

A rare example of Pugin domestic silver, it was priced at £800-£1,200 in the catalogue but sold to a private collector for £3,200.



Photo copyright: Kingham & Orme

The above has been based on an article in *Antique Collecting Magazine*.

EW Pugin Quiz

Hopefully by now all of you will have received the latest issue of *True Principles*, dedicated to the life and work of AWN Pugin's eldest son Edward (EWP). We hope you have found it of interest, and that it acted as something of a *divertissement* in this troubled and worrying time. Gerard has compiled the following 'Mastermind'-like quiz for you to test yourselves!

The answers will be in the next edition of the e-newsletter.

1. When and where was EWP born?
2. What was his mother's name and maiden name?
3. Who was his godfather?
4. What were the names of his brother and half-brother?
5. Where was he educated?
6. Where did he live after moving from Birmingham, before returning to Ramsgate?
7. What was the name of the architect with whom he first went into partnership?
8. Why was he created a Knight of the Order of St Sylvester?
9. What rank did he attain in the Ramsgate Corp of Artillery Volunteers?
10. What was the name of his factory in Ramsgate, and what did it produce?
11. What was the name of his former pupil who became his Irish partner, and which of EWP's sisters did he marry?
12. Who acted as his agent in Ireland after 1868?
13. To whom did he become engaged in 1862?
14. What was the name of the famous painter he was found guilty of libelling in 1874, and what was the cause of the dispute between them?
15. Which Political Party did EWP support?
16. After whom was the Granville Hotel so named?
17. Which region of the UK has the highest number of buildings by EWP?
18. Which church did Pevsner consider to be EWP's 'masterwork'?
19. What was the dedication of EWP's final parish church, and where is it located?
20. Name one of EWP's favourite sculptors.
21. To where did EWP travel in 1873 in the hope of improving his financial situation by acquiring new commissions?
22. What sedation drug did EWP take towards the end of his life, and which of its reported side-effects characterized his behaviour?
23. Where and when did EWP die, and what was his age?
24. Where - *Beep-beep*, I've started so I'll finish! - is EWP buried?