

NEWSLETTER

NO.28 – AUTUMN 2022
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60th anniversary
Methodist Modern
Art Collection
1962–2022

FRIENDS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION



Marking the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Collection

Rebecca Gibbs in Focus

Report on Bewdley Exhibition

Tribute to Sarah Middleton

John N Gibbs in Conversation

EDITORIAL

Welcome to a packed issue of the Newsletter as we mark the sixtieth anniversary of the formation of the Methodist Modern Art Collection.

We would like, once again, to acknowledge the support of CultureShock Media in the production of our Newsletters.

Katharine Farnham-Dear



Art Collection Management Committee Members

Prof. Ann Sumner (Chair), Sarah Allard, Ian Baker (Secretary, Friends Group), Katharine Farnham-Dear, Rebecca Gibbs, Revd Catherine Hutton, Revd Graham Kent, Corinne Miller (Vice-Chair), Verity Smith, and Jo Hibbard, Director of Engagement (in attendance).

Administrator – Liz Millard

Phone: 020 7467 5214
email: artcollection@methodistchurch.org.uk
www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection

Ian Baker

Secretary to the Friends of the Collection
Montrose, Brockhill Road, Colwall,
Herefordshire, WR13 6EX
Phone: 01684 540477
email: mmacfriends@btinternet.com

Katharine Farnham-Dear

Newsletter Editor
Phone: 07908 843589
email: KatharineFD@aol.com

Produced by Cultureshock Media
Art Director: Alfonso Iacurci
www.cultureshockmedia.co.uk

Front Cover: Corinne Miller, Professor Ann Sumner and Verity Smith with works by Frank Roper in the chapel of Woodhouse Grove School, one of the loans made to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the Collection (photo: Verity Smith)

3GENERATE 2022

We are delighted that a small number of original works from the Collection, including the ever popular *Dalit Madonna*, were once again on display at 3Generate, the Children & Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church, which took place at the NEC Birmingham from Friday 30 September to Sunday 2 October 2022. The borrowed pictures were mounted on screens in their own designated display area with lots of opportunity for the young people to think and talk about them. In another exciting development, the young people were able to use specialist glasses to experience the images in the way that someone who is visually impaired might do, reflecting 3Generate's aim to create an inclusive and diverse space. Thanks are extended to Corinne Miller who worked hard planning this and to Jo Hibbard who was once again stewarding the exhibition.



ONLINE TALK BY ANN SUMNER - '60 YEARS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION' - BOOK NOW!

As part of our 60th Anniversary celebrations, our Chair, Professor Ann Sumner will be giving a free online talk at The Epworth Old Rectory in Lincolnshire on Saturday 12 November at 11.00 am until 12.00. To book a place, please email Anya Johnson, the Visits and Collections Manager, at vcm@epwortholdrectory.org.uk. You will be sent a Zoom link along with the meeting code and password. Ann will outline the early history of the Collection and describe how it has developed, contextualising the acquisition of Clive Hicks-Jenkins' *Christ writes in the Dust: The Woman Caught in Adultery* painting of 2011, currently on loan to The Epworth Old Rectory as part of the 60th anniversary programme.

Artist Caroline Waterlow (L) welcomes Sarah Middleton to her *Via Crucis* exhibition (Photo courtesy Bob Williams)

NEW NETWORK

We have recently become members of the Religion, Collections and Heritage Group, a new Specialist Subject Network, and Committee members attended the first online meeting - <https://religioncollections.wordpress.com>

SYNOD VISIT

We report on page 5 that four works from the Collection by Frank Roper are on display at Woodhouse Grove School. We are pleased to note that the Synod of the Methodist Church's Yorkshire West District met at the school on 10 September 2022 and were able to view the works.

ARTSERVE ARTICLE

Readers who also read the ArtServe magazine will have seen the Collection featured in the Summer edition. Christine Welham wrote about the creative textiles workshop held in September 2021 to respond to the works from the Collection then on display at Balsall Common. It is very exciting to see photos of the textiles created in response to our works by Maggi Hambling, Francis Hoyland, Jacques Iselin and Theyre Lee-Elliott.

VIA CRUCIS

We are delighted to report that Friend of the Collection, Caroline Waterlow, was again invited to show prints of her *Via Crucis - An Interpretation of the Stations of the Cross* works, over Easter 2022. On this occasion the exhibition was hosted by St. John's, Chilcompton, a beautifully situated Parish Church near Wells in Somerset.

Former long serving Management Committee members, Sarah Middleton and Bob Williams, very much enjoyed visiting the exhibition.



A view from the Chair

Ann Sumner

Happy 60th Birthday to the Methodist Modern Art Collection! We are delighted to celebrate this milestone with you all and to thank you for your continued support of this unique collection of 20th century religious art. To mark the anniversary, six key loans have been made to locations across the country (see page 5) and I would like to thank Vice-Chair Corinne Miller for her dedicated work in arranging these loans so efficiently. It has also been a great opportunity for us to organise some events to support the loan programme.



As part of our 60th anniversary commemorations it was an honour for me to pose a series of questions to Dr John Newton Gibbs, the former Chair of the Collection. We share these questions and his answers with you in our 'In Conversation' article on page 11. John is, of course, the son of one of our key founders, Dr John Morel Gibbs, and he was able to give some fascinating insights into the early history of the Collection, as well as its development during his time as Chair.

Our friends at Coventry Cathedral celebrate their own 60 year milestone this year, following the consecration of their amazing building on 25 May 1962, so we are delighted that one of our most loved works, Maggi Hambling's *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006* has been hung in the Cathedral to mark our shared celebrations.

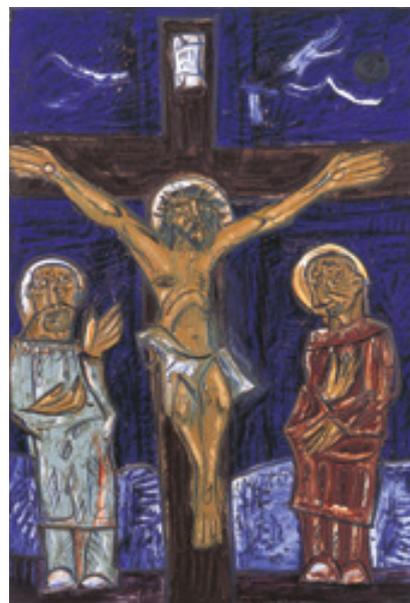
From the very outset, our Collection was cutting edge and many early acquisitions remain firm favourites still today. While the Collection is renowned for its strengths in British 20th Century art, international works were also acquired from the beginning, ensuring the Collection's enduring attraction to a world-wide audience. In fact, the very first painting acquired was *The Crucifixion* by the Indian artist F N Souza, who came from Goa and set up the Progressive Artists Group in 1947, the year of Indian independence. He then came to London, and later worked in Paris and America. His original style was influenced by Picasso's Cubist period, as well as South Indian bronzes and tribal African art. This painting was displayed in August 2017 in St Paul's Cathedral to mark 70 years of Indian Independence. 2022 of course, marks the 75th anniversary of that independence, which is being celebrated all around the world. Earlier this year, a new book *20th Century Indian Art: Modern, Post-Independence, Contemporary* (Thames and Hudson), was published featuring F N Souza. This major volume reflects a growing interest in 20th century Indian

art and is regarded as the definitive work on the subject.

The F N Souza was acquired in late June 1962, and followed early that July by Albert Herbert's *Epiphany* and the two Georges Rouault aquatints from the *Miserere* series of 1923. These works were all acquired through the auspices of the Revd. Douglas Wollen, a close friend of Dr John Morel Gibbs. More works entered the Collection in the autumn of 1962, with Francis Hoyland's *Holy Communion predella*, Philip le Bas's *The stripping of our Lord* and Ceri Richards'

outstanding watercolour, *The Supper at Emmaus* (see page 7), all acquired on 4 September. On 10 September a large early drawing by Elisabeth Frink of *The Pieta* was purchased. Although not a sculpture as might be expected, it is a powerful and moving image. Frink had recently risen to fame with her Eagle Lectern at Coventry Cathedral (near which *the Pieta* was hung last autumn) and acquiring a work by her, when she was still only 28, illustrated the inspiring and forward thinking connoisseurship of Wollen and Gibbs. From the start, works by a number of women artists were represented: Euryl Steven's *The Raising of Lazarus* was acquired in late 1964 and *The Five Thousand* and *Storm over the Lake* by Eularia Clarke in

F N Souza's *The Crucifixion* was the first painting acquired for the Collection in 1962 © TMCP



1965. The former, which is actually dated 1962, was lent to Shieldfield Art Works (SAW), Newcastle over this summer as part of our 60th celebratory programme (see page 5). By the end of 1962, the Collection had also been enriched by four paintings by John Reilly, and another illustration of *The Supper of Emmaus*, this time by Roy de Maistre, which was acquired on 17 December. The Collection was taking shape and in the following year, its first tour took place.

To hear more about the early history of the Collection, please join me for an online illustrated talk organised with our colleagues at The Epworth Old Rectory (see page 2 for details of how to book).

The Management Committee has found our 60th anniversary inspiring, as we reflect on the vision of those who have gone before us, inspiring. We came together for a visioning Away Day at Victoria Methodist Church in Bristol in early June, meeting for the first time in person since the pandemic. We looked at strategy and forward planning, determining that we must prioritise the new home search. I have therefore been working with colleagues, since my return from hip replacement surgery, on a New Home Statement and updated criteria for our partners to consider. We recognise that this will be a dialogue, as we seek to find potential hosts who could provide us with a new base, appropriate facilities and support for our continuing touring. The works are very much 'out and about' again and this autumn we were pleased to lend works again to 3Generate ensuring that the Collection engages with young people (see page 2). Next year, we have two major exhibitions drawn from the Collection in Bristol and in Eastbourne (see page 14). I was in Bristol over the summer, with Vice-Chair Corinne Miller and fellow Committee member Rebecca Gibbs, to talk through the *Articles of Faith* exhibition. We left feeling inspired by the work that Revd Richard Sharples, Jane Stacey, the Outreach and Service member, and the team have been doing, planning their selection and inter-faith interpretation of our works. They have been partnering locally with key groups and are grateful for the support of Munira Hashmi, Muslim Chaplain, University of Bristol, Shiv Sama, Chairman, Avon Indian Community Association and Dr David Turns, Honorary President, Bristol Hebrew Congregation, who have helped them shape their ideas and programme.

It has been a pleasure to work with Corinne Miller and Verity Smith on the 60th celebration loans and most especially to visit Woodhouse Grove School Chapel, Apperley Bridge, Bradford this summer supporting the hanging of four works by

Frank Roper there. These have not been shown in over ten years and look particularly attractive in the beautiful chapel (see front cover). The Yorkshire sculptor Roper came from nearby Haworth and trained at Keighley School of Art, then the Royal College of Art in the 1930s. He spent much of his life teaching, settling in Cardiff and teaching there from 1946–73.

Sadly, 2022 has seen the departure from our Committee of one of the longest serving and most dedicated members, Sarah Middleton, a familiar face for so many of you. I am sure you will want to join me in thanking her for her tremendous hard work, energy and enthusiasm for the Collection. She will be much missed and I am grateful to John N Gibbs for writing a warm tribute to her (see page 10). Sarah remains closely associated with the Collection.

Professor Ann Sumner

Clive Hicks-Jenkins's *Christ writes in the Dust: The Woman Caught in Adultery* will feature in Ann Sumner's free online talk on 12 November (see page 2 for details) © TMCP



Seeing the Spiritual

Celebrating Sixty Years of the Methodist Modern Art Collection 1962–2022

Over the last sixty years the Methodist Modern Art Collection has enriched the lives of thousands of people. Brought together by individuals passionate about the power of art to engage people at a deep spiritual level, the Collection has always been a loan collection. Works are shown both in galleries and in diverse venues; in small rural communities and larger urban areas. Taking faith to the people is very much in the spirit of early Methodism when John Wesley exhorted Methodists to spread the good news, 'Take it out! Take it out to the people!'

This unique collection is now seen as 'one of the art world's unexpected treasures shining new light on the historically rich relationship between art and faith' (Tim Marlow OBE, former Artistic Director Royal Academy of Arts, London).

To celebrate sixty years of collecting and art based activism, works from the Collection are being lent to six venues across the country until December 2022. The selected venues demonstrate the current strands of work being pursued by the Management Committee.

Working with children and young people, we contribute to events such as 3Generate. In addition for the next year the aluminium reliefs, four reliefs from a set of *Stations of the Cross* by Frank Roper, will be on show at Woodhouse Grove School, Apperley Bridge, Bradford. Originally founded in 1812 by the Methodist Conference to provide a boarding school for the sons of itinerant Methodist ministers, it is now part of the family of Methodist Schools. We are delighted that the school wishes to display these works in the chapel where pupils can engage with them as part of their education, as they have not been shown for a number of years.

Paintings from the Collection have frequently been used as a resource for ecumenical interaction. Most recently at the interfaith dinner in Coventry, during the Year of Culture celebrations, and in Chester Cathedral's exhibition *Images of Christ*. As part of our 60th anniversary celebration we are once again lending a painting to Coventry Cathedral, where *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006* by Maggi Hambling creates a striking entrance to the Chapel of Unity. Opened in 1962, the same year that the Methodist Modern Art Collection was founded, Coventry Cathedral is the outstanding example of the post war movement that promoted the relationship between art and faith.

Creating opportunities for dialogue within local communities, both within the Methodist Connexion and with the wider community means that each year the Collection is actively used by diverse local groups. For the 60th anniversary *The Five Thousand* by Eularia Clarke and *The Elements of Holy Communion* by Jacques Iselin have been lent to Shieldfield Art

Works (SAW), Newcastle (until end of August 2022) and to Balsall Common Methodist Church respectively.

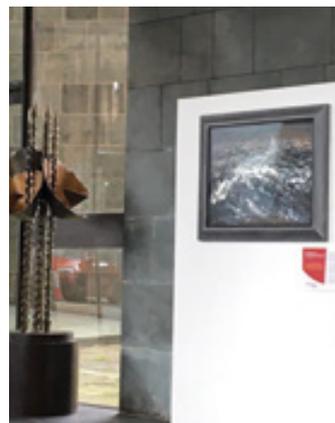
At the heart of this Collection is Methodism. The loan of the watercolour *Crucifixion* by Welsh artist Michael Edmonds, to y Gaer, Brecon, where it is displayed alongside his watercolour of the Brecon Beacons, reflects the Welsh origins of the Collection. While the painting *Christ Writes in the Dust - the Woman Taken in Adultery* by Clive Hicks-Jenkins is currently on show at The Old Rectory Epworth, where it is part of the Women in Methodism display.

The Methodist Modern Art Collection, continues to act as a bridge between our Methodist communities and their neighbours. Barbara Easton, former Vice President of the Methodist Conference encourages borrowers, '...to share them – to use them as a stepping stone to expressing what faith means in your life within your local community, by the way that you enable people to engage with them, and the way you are with the people who engage with them, your hospitality, your warmth and your warm hearts.'

Corinne Miller

For more information go to <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/latest-news/all-news/seeing-the-spiritual/>

Maggi Hambling's painting, *Good Friday: Walking on Water* 2006, installed at the entrance to the Unity Chapel, Coventry Cathedral 2022 © TMCP (Photo courtesy of Georgia Cowie)



Michael Edmond's *Crucifixion* on show at y Gaer, 2022 © TMCP (Photo courtesy of John Gibbs)



Rebecca NK Gibbs's

In Focus

In 2017 my Uncle John Newton Gibbs, the then Chair, invited me to join the Methodist Modern Art Collection Management Committee and I responded positively. That is the short story.

I think that the reasons supporting this action were my practice in the arts; a BA Hons degree in Art in a Community Context with Drama and Theatre studies and a portfolio of a variety of multi-disciplinary commissions, projects, performances and grants. I suspect that my four years as a Director of St Pauls Afrikan Caribbean Carnival, including two years as Chair and the three years as a Director of the Afrika Eye Film festival with a year as Chair, and then a posting as interim Administrator and fundraiser may also have influenced this invitation.

But the journey to the committee, I believe, started many years before that; if you'll indulge me, I shall share my thoughts:

It's 1981 and a little girl ballroom dances with her grandfather, she is 6 years old and he is 69. Her feet are placed on his as they synchronise around the dance floor; guided, secure, graceful. They, the grandfather John Morel Gibbs, his wife Sheila, second son James and family (wife Patience, son Benjamin and daughter Rebecca), are on a trip that will take them to, amongst other places, Santiago de Compostela.

They don't know then that she will achieve her singing diploma and take the lead in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* in twelve years' time at The Redgrave Theatre, Bristol or that some years later she will co-choreograph a dance performance for a Methodist Youth Conference as part of the Cre8 dance group. And she doesn't know that he has, in 1958, been elected Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, or that in 1962 he invited the Revd Douglas Wollen to assist him to assemble works that would become recognised by some as 'the most important modern religious art collection outside the Vatican' known as the Methodist Modern Art Collection. They don't know that in 15 years' time the terminal impact of prostate cancer would separate them. For this moment it's a little girl and her grandfather.



In writing this piece, I found an old photograph showing my grandfather and me on the steps of St Maeburn, Penarth, his childhood home. It was taken circa 1985, when I was around 10 years old. My grandparents dressed me up in my Great Grandmother's clothes - she was a petite woman - then we posed for photos in the afternoon.

Rebecca Gibbs's Choice

For the purpose of this article I have chosen *The Supper at Emmaus*, by Ceri Richards (1903-1971) pen and ink, watercolour and gouache on paper, 1958.

The restricted colour palette allows the shape of the yellow cross to project. It is possibly a doorway or opening combined with the surface of the table identified by a jug and plates.

The yellow seated figure is so illuminated and backlit that its clothing is dispersed into a kind of shimmering mirage, highlighting the face with neutral expression, the open, reassuring gesture of the hands and foot, placed flat. The yellow reaches out nearly touching all four edges of the canvas; an extended embrace.

The predominately blue and yellow (or golden) palette reminds me of Early Christian or Byzantine art and symbolises the celestial and the divine respectively. And green is the two former colours blended and interpreted as, perhaps, reliability, evergreen, natural, cyclical, peaceful and constant.

We seem to have caught the figure in green on the right in focused prayer in contrast to the moment of realisation, of recognition, for the figure in blue in the foreground.

The blue figure is literally taken aback, their left hand reaching round to the back of the chair in an instance of

movement, with their right foot placed for action. This character seems poised to stand in astonishment. Meanwhile the hands opposite signal calm, patience, because the figure in green, on the right, is still, in prayer; both present and simultaneously unaware.

I am struck by the boldness of the yellow in this piece; it's unavoidable, but I am beguiled by the feet; their size, their expression, and then the hands. These oversized features tell the story, through images and words of action and emotion.

The road to Emmaus tells of the fourth appearance of Christ after his crucifixion; Luke 24: 13-32. Two travellers discuss the events of the previous days; the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, when a third traveller joins them on the road. They invite Him to share a meal.

For me it is a reminder that our shared acts of kindness, compassion and understanding are present in every day. They can be noticed, practiced and appreciated in all our actions and interactions. An understanding of Christian scripture helps decipher the story depicted here but the meaning is comprehensible to all; embracing religion or non-religion, spirituality or indifference, because it encourages and reminds us to practice humanity.



Ceri Richards' *The Supper at Emmaus*, © TMCP Rebecca Gibbs's choice from the Collection

For all people

Wyre Forest Gallery, Bewdley Museum, 26 March–24 April 2022



The pictures at Bewdley provoked a lot of conversations (Photo courtesy of Margaret Ashmore)

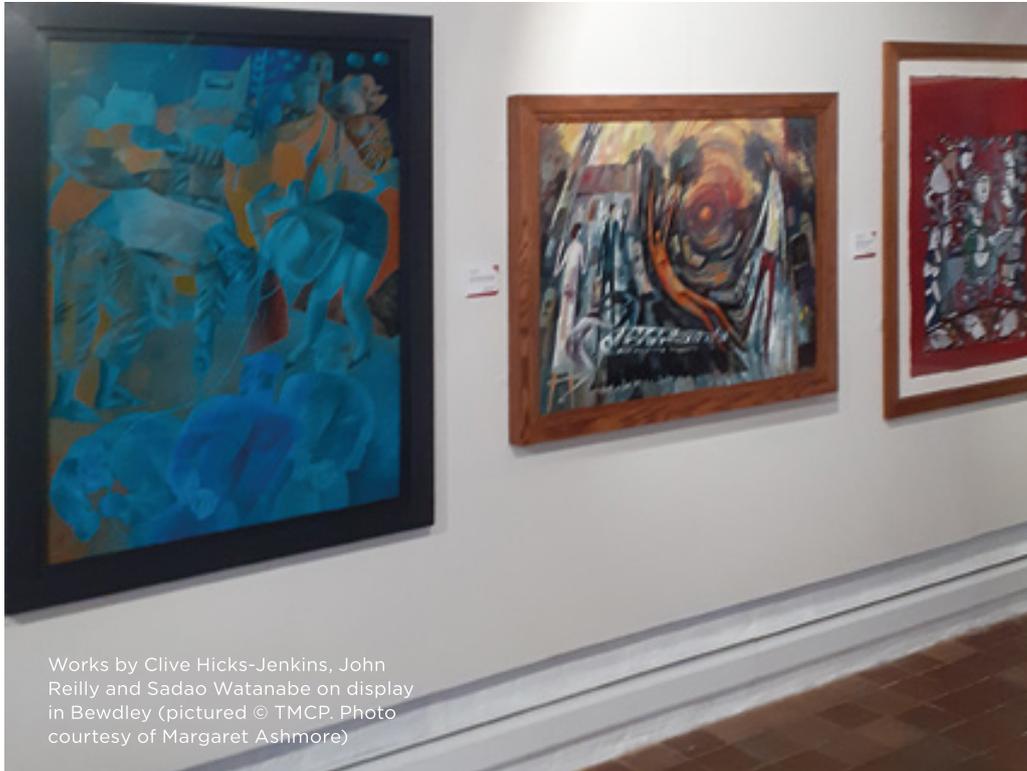
Ian Baker's article in the Spring 2022 / Issue 27 of the Friends' Newsletter introduced the Bewdley exhibition *For All People*. In his article he challenged us here in Bewdley with the words, 'Be alert! Be present!'. Now that the exhibition and all the events are water under Thomas Telford's bridge across the Severn, we can sit down and look around to ask, 'Well? Were we alert and present?'

Bewdley is a small tourist town of some eight and a half thousand people. It lies on the banks of the River Severn and avoids excitement until it suffers one of the river's periodic severe floods, when the population is swollen by local and national press and film crews. Go back several centuries and it was a different story; as the highest navigable port on the river, it was a busy commercial town and boasted numerous alehouses. Maybe to balance out this plethora of alcohol, there are also seven churches from six denominations.

These churches come together each Lent and Eastertide to hold an event called the Bewdley Passion. It began in 2013 with

a Passion Play involving townspeople and professional actors that filled the town centre on Good Friday. It continued until 2020, when our proposed exhibition of twenty pictures from the Collection was to form the basis for a town-wide series of events. Alas, that was not to be. We suffered two Covid-related postponements making it very, very hard to gather the mental, emotional and physical energy to make a third attempt to mount the exhibition. And after two years without our Bewdley Passion, another Eastertide would have crept quietly away. Instead, we were cajoled, pushed and encouraged to work on the many details that went into a truly blessed time.

The exhibition, housed at Bewdley Museum, welcomed over two thousand visitors, and our visitors book recorded some moving comments: '*The Washing of the Feet* has moved me to tears', 'In these troubled times such works provide consolation', 'What wonderful foresight to amass this collection', 'A feeling of being held by the Christian narrative in this intimate space', 'So much more vivid and alive than



Works by Clive Hicks-Jenkins, John Reilly and Sadao Watanabe on display in Bewdley (pictured © TMCP. Photo courtesy of Margaret Ashmore)



Mike Dornie led an interactive session at Bewdley entitled 'Jesus the Painter' (Photo courtesy of Margaret Ashmore).

looking at a small print', 'During this time of commercial Easter indulgence this is perfect for Maundy Thursday and Holy Week - gave me goosebumps', 'How lucky Bewdley is to have such a wonderful exhibition', 'A spiritual journey; thank you Bewdley for allowing this opportunity to witness such power to lead our thoughts to Easter'.

During the exhibition the stewards noticed that, unlike the way we so often behave in an art gallery, pausing occasionally but spending little time with most exhibits, people in this small gallery spent time slowly moving from picture to picture and pausing for some time in front of each one.

As well as adult visitors we were glad to liaise with our Church of England Primary School who made the exhibition part of their work in school. Just before the end of term most of the children walked down the hill to the Museum and - a few at a time - came into the gallery to look at the pictures and fill in their worksheets. Adults there during the school visit were surprised and impressed by the children's complete concentration and engagement with the pictures. Without any preconception engendered by the 'modern art' label, the children were excited and impressed. One onlooker said with some surprise, 'They saw things in the pictures I hadn't seen'. After their visit the children produced their own artwork which was later on show in St. Anne's Church.

Alongside the exhibition we held a series of workshops, talks and reflections designed to educate and challenge us, along with Sunday evening services throughout Lent when all the churches in the town came together to celebrate the profound truth that art does not favour any one way of worship but encompasses all of faith. From the Elim Pentecostal church joyfully celebrating the Michael Edmonds' *Cross over the City* to the Roman Catholic Lectio Divina based on Roy de Maistre's *Noli me Tangere*, our ecumenical gatherings were greatly enriched by such diversity of worship.

And at our closing meeting, when we said goodbye to these superb pieces of art, we were able to say, 'our Passion happened! We were indeed present!'

Margaret Ashmore

Tribute to Sarah Middleton

by Dr John N Gibbs



I think with enormous warmth and gratitude of Sarah's contribution to the promotion and development of the Collection.

She had some involvement with its work from a very early stage in her career, having been coordinator for Creative Arts in Methodism at Methodist Church headquarters for more than 10 years. In 2003, she became the Connexional Team's representative on our Management Committee.

Reflecting upon her sustained contribution to our activities, I think first of her research into the actual and potential impact of the Collection. In 2006-2007, as part of her MA in Arts & Cultural Management at the University of Sussex, she made an assessment of the value of the Collection by soliciting and examining the views of artists, curators and exhibition organisers. This is a topic dear to her heart and one which she has continued to explore in various ways.



I would also like to mention that it was at about this time, and together with fellow committee member Angela Dewar, that she brought to the attention of the Committee a work that we purchased and which has become one of our most popular: John Brokenshire's *Untitled - Pentecost*. She was also very much involved in the acquisition of Jyoti Sahi's *Dalit Madonna*.

Not long after this, she was a guiding force in the production of the highly-valued study course 'Creative Spirit' based on eight works in the Collection (see back cover). The course continues to be widely used: indeed only last year my wife Liz and I took part in an online Church-in-Wales fellowship group that was using it.

In 2009 Sarah took on the Training Officer post for the Methodist South-East District and this led to her increasing involvement with the creation and delivery of study days on the role of the Collection in worship and mission. This activity developed further when, some eight years ago, she moved to South Wales and started to work on a freelance basis. Many of these study days have been held in advance an exhibition and have provided a much-appreciated means of preparing local people for its arrival. In this context I think particularly of her role in relation to two 2018 exhibitions. One was at the end of the year when the Collection was shown at the Royal Hibernian Academy in Dublin, and the other in early summer when it was displayed in locations across the Isle of Man. An interview with Sarah for Manx Radio can be found in the Resources section of the Methodist Church website and gives a good idea of her engaging personality and deep commitment to the Collection. More recently she has taken the initiative in pioneering some online courses exploring art in worship and theology: works from the Collection featuring in these also.

John Gibbs

In Conversation

Professor Ann Sumner in conversation with Dr John N Gibbs about the Methodist Modern Art Collection

PART 1



As part of our 60th anniversary celebrations, Professor Ann Sumner interviewed Dr John Newton Gibbs, son of the Collection's founder and himself a former Chair. She asked him about his father, Dr John Morel Gibbs, the early years of the Collection, and his own transformative period as Chair, when the Collection grew from strength to strength. This is the first part of the interview.. The second part will come in Spring 2023.

Ann Sumner: Thank you John for agreeing to talk about your father and the early years of the Collection. Can you tell us about your father, when and where he was born and where he was educated?

John N Gibbs: My father was born in Penarth, South Wales in 1912. He was an only child, his own father serving in World War 1 and being killed in September 1917. His mother, my grandmother, was a remarkable woman with a strong social conscience, who sought fully to live out her Christian belief.

He went to The Leys school and then read law at Cambridge where his faith was greatly strengthened by his membership of one of the University Methodist Society Groups.

He was then called to the bar but found the legal profession unsatisfying. So he took a second degree, this time in psychology at the University College, London, after which he qualified as an educational psychologist at Guy's Hospital.

So, after studying psychology, what career did your father follow and did he return to Wales?

He was a Conscientious Objector in World War 2 and held the post of child psychologist for Hertfordshire. After the war he took a position at University College Cardiff and developed a career in psychology with a special interest in social work and residential care.

Tell us something about his family life.

My mother was born Sheila Newton and my parents met as children through Trinity Methodist Church Penarth. They grew up, getting to know each other through the church and through shared interests such as amateur theatricals. They married in 1937 and lived in London while he was completing his training in psychology. After the war they, and their growing family, eventually five sons, returned to live in Penarth.

Your father was very active in Methodism throughout his life – tell us something about this.

He was very much involved in his local Methodist circuit; being a Sunday School Superintendent, a circuit steward and a local preacher. He and my mother created the Trinity Drama Group which put on some demanding plays, many with large casts. He was also very active in the Connexion, as was my mother once her children had grown up a bit. He was specially involved with the Methodist residential schools and in 1958 served as Vice-President of Conference.

When do you think he first became interested in the visual arts? Was this a passion he shared with your mother?

His background in the visual arts would have been very conventional. I think that the time that he and my mother spent in London as a young married couple without children was very important. They helped with the drama among disadvantaged young people at the famous Methodist centre, Clubland, but also went to the professional theatre a lot and became aware of the value of the arts in Christian witness: T S Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, for example. They also became

interested in design. The first art purchase they made together was of some costume designs by Motley, a partnership of three women which brought design flair to the London stage. At this time, they were building a Modernist house in Penarth, and design elements came in here as well. And then, although they did not occupy the house until after the war, a Modernist house called for modern works of art.

Tell us something about your father as a collector of contemporary art in the 1940s and 50s. In more recent years he has been seen as a ground-breaking collector in Wales.

Some of the earliest purchases were made at galleries in London: a work by John Piper for example. And then later he bought a Christopher Wood and a Paul Nash. Once the family was based in Penarth, he became interested in the work of contemporary South Wales artists - people like Eric Malthouse and Ray Howard Jones.

He held various positions in the art world in Wales. Which do you think he enjoyed most?

There is no doubt that he valued his involvement with the Turner House in Penarth, an art gallery that became an offshoot of the National Museum of Wales. It held many interesting exhibitions through the late 40s and 50s. Later, he was on the art committee of the National Museum itself. There was also the Contemporary Art Society for Wales, for which he was the buyer one year. He was Chair for a while and then President towards the end of his life.

The introduction to the first touring exhibition of the Collection stated that the Collection had been 'made possible by the generosity of a Methodist layman concerned to do something to bridge the gulf which has existed in this country between the artist and the Church'. How did your father come to plan a collection for the Methodist Church, bringing together two great passions in his life?

I am sure that it was meeting Revd Douglas Wollen that was crucial to the development of the idea. Between 1957 and 1961, Douglas was a minister at one of the two Methodist churches in Penarth. When he arrived he was amazed to meet a Methodist layman who had modern art on the walls of his house and my father was amazed to meet a Methodist minister with a deep and passionate understanding of contemporary painting. Together they sought an opportunity to alter attitudes towards the visual arts within the Methodist Church.

The project became very much a joint effort - tell us about Douglas Wollen's role.

To a large extent Douglas created the Collection. My father set aside a sum of money and Douglas was given a largely free hand over its use, deciding the nature of the Collection and the works to be included. He contacted a range of artists whose work he knew and visited a great many exhibitions.

Your father purchased Graham Sutherland's *The Deposition* at Sotheby's auction house in London in 1963. It is one of the most famous paintings in the Collection. Was it his favourite painting do you think?

My father did very much enjoy making purchases at auction. I think he was very moved to have the opportunity of adding such a powerful Graham Sutherland work to the Collection. I don't suppose he would use the word 'favourite' for such a work, imbued as it is with echoes of the Holocaust.

The Collection first toured between 1963 and 1965. Tell us about this tour.

Again, the credit for arranging this remarkable tour lies with Douglas Wollen. It encompassed 30 venues and the works were seen by over 100,000 people. Major galleries were involved like the Walker in Liverpool, and the Birmingham and Manchester City Art galleries. Much of the transport was provided by another Methodist layman, Pat Welch, whose business in Birmingham had vehicles that were considered suitable. It was a far cry from the specialist firms that transport artworks today.

After the tour, the works were housed for some years in various Methodist schools and then in 1978, they were placed at Southlands teacher training college. That fitted in with your father's interest in education, didn't it?

Yes, it did and there were certainly some positive features to this period in the Collection's life. For example while it was at Kingswood School Bath, it was reviewed for the school magazine by one of the pupils - Richard Cork. He has described how this process determined him to make a career in art criticism - which he has done most successfully, becoming one of the most respected people in the world of modern art. He remains one of the Collection's most influential supporters.

The arrangement at Southlands did not prove to be entirely sustainable, did it?

No, not really. It started well, with a chaplain who sought to make really good use of the pictures, but when he was no longer there, interest waned and the Collection was largely forgotten. Some of the works even suffered flood damage.

I think that your father stepped in to remedy the situation. This was a significant move was it not?

The key event was a Festival of Christian Art in Penarth in 1990. In advance of this my father arranged for the works to be retrieved and, as necessary, restored under the auspices of the National Museum of Wales. They were hung in the Turner House together with some of the National Museum's own works.

After this, I know that the move was made to house the Collection at the Methodist Church's Department of Education and Youth and make it available for touring again. We will follow up this point in the second part of this discussion when I will be moving on to your long-standing role in respect of the Collection. Before that, I would like to ask if your father played any significant further part in the life of the Collection?

I would say that the most significant things he did were to add further works to the Collection – for example in 1991 by commissioning Norman Adams to paint *The Entry into Jerusalem*. He then asked Douglas Wollen's son Roger to write a full account of the Collection's history, drawing on his father's documents and conducting much research into the artists whose work is represented. For a number of these artists, Roger's account is the most comprehensive account available. (See below for details of this publication.)

Finally, your father was very interested in ecumenical interaction and the Collection has since been shown in the churches of many different denominations. In 2021 four works were shown in Coventry Cathedral and currently *Good Friday: Walking on Water, 2006* by Maggi Hambling is on show there. Opened in 1962, the same year that the Collection was founded, the cathedral is seen as the outstanding example of the post war movement that promoted the relationship between art and faith. Do you think the cathedral was a spur to your father starting the Collection? The first work to be purchased in September 1962 was by Elisabeth Frink, who created Coventry's famous

eagle lectern there, and your father purchased the Ralph Beyer pencil drawing, a study for one of Coventry's Tablets of the Word in 1963.

I don't think it was a 'cause and effect' relationship. However, there are undoubtedly real links: particularly, the fact that every detail of the cathedral – down to the hassocks - was well designed. As you say my father purchased the Beyer drawing and this, interestingly, was not initially part of the Collection but featured in a companion exhibition on good design in churches which toured alongside it.

Further Reading:

Wakelin, Peter (2004) *An Art-Accustomed Eye: John Gibbs and art appreciation in Wales 1945-1996*. National Museum of Wales (ISBN 0 7200 0555 8).

Wollen, Roger (2003) *Catalogue of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art. The Trustees of the Methodist Collection of Modern Christian Art* (ISBN 0 9538135 1 7).



Dr John N Gibbs sent us this photograph from around 1955 showing his father, Dr John Morel Gibbs (right) and Revd Douglas Wollen (left) sitting with their colleague from the Penarth Circuit, Revd Percy Watkinson (centre).

FORTHCOMING EXHIBITION IN BRISTOL

**ARTICLES OF FAITH: VICTORIA METHODIST CHURCH
20 FEBRUARY - 8 APRIL 2023**

To my knowledge, this is the first time works from the Methodist Modern Art Collection have been exhibited alongside arts/artefacts from various faith traditions. The title of the exhibition suggests those beliefs which people of faith hold close to our hearts. We do believe different things, yet we share so much, and when we get under the skin to the inner experience of practising our faith, then we draw closer together. Hence the strapline, 'Where our paths meet'. We hope that those who are curious about religion, or who have no faith, will feel equally included.

The artworks and artefacts will be gathered into eight clusters which relate to our common human spirituality: hope, suffering, hospitality, relationship & mystery, justice & peace, text & story, life & death, compassion & service. By grouping them this way, we hope that a 'conversation' will be opened up, as we view one artwork/artefact/faith tradition, in the light of others. Into this conversation we have deliberately introduced artefacts from Victoria Methodist Church itself (eg the font and lectern). For *'Articles of Faith'* also suggests that this is not just an exhibition of paintings and sculpture, but also includes items used at home or in a place of worship as people practise their faith.

The whole project has in fact been one long conversation on the part of the planning group, which has widened and deepened as we have been joined by people from faith traditions other than Christianity. It is my deepest hope that an enduring legacy of this exhibition will be a contribution to the good relationships between people of different faiths in the City of Bristol.

Richard Sharples, Minister Victoria Methodist Church

Readers will be interested to know that Sarah Middleton will be giving a talk at Victoria Methodist Church as part of *'Articles of Faith'* on the evening of Tuesday 28 February 2023 entitled 'The Methodist Modern Art Collection - discovering Jesus'.

Torah scrolls from the Bristol Hebrew Synagogue (Photo courtesy of Dr David Turns, Honorary President Bristol Hebrew Congregation)



The lead image Victoria Methodist Church have selected for this exhibition is Mark Cazalet's *Fool of God (Christ in the Garden)* © TMCP



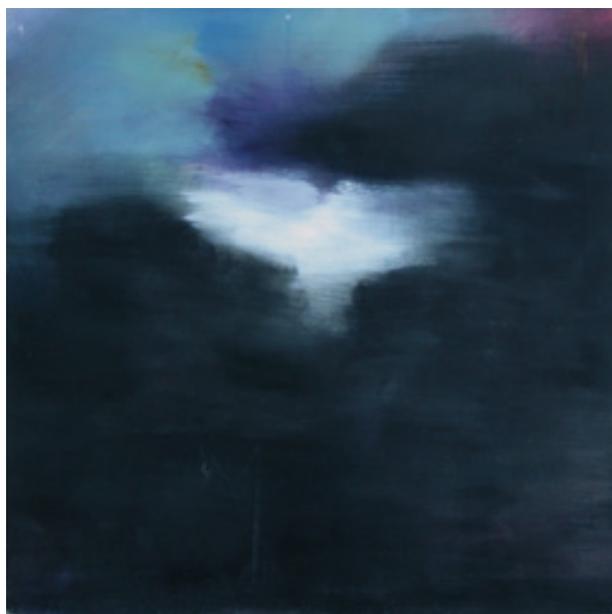
FORTHCOMING EXHIBITION IN EASTBOURNE

**NEW VISIONS: EMMANUEL CHURCH
26 MAY - 30 JUNE 2023**

'New Visions' is the theme chosen by the team at Emmanuel church in Eastbourne for their forthcoming exhibition. This seems very appropriate as it will be held in a brand new church building that is being constructed for the Methodist URC Local Ecumenical Partnership. Revd Paul Tabraham explains 'Our church has existed since January 2018 when four churches (two Methodist and two United Reformed) came together as one, Emmanuel. All four decided that being a church in the 21st century meant something different from that which had gone before, including leaving behind premises that had served their purpose, and that God would enable them to do something new together and in new ways'. The theme expresses new life and new hope. Revd Paul explains 'We were attracted by the resonance of holding a Pentecost exhibition given the number of works in the Collection which suggest new life, new hope and God's Spirit at work. Pentecost is often referred to as the birthday of God's church and so is very fitting for the venture at Eastbourne.'

The Management Committee are thrilled that the Collection can be part of the celebration of a new church community on the south coast.

The exhibition will be publicised with John Brokenshire's *Untitled - Pentecost* © TMCP



ELSEWHERE IN THE ART WORLD

The Collection includes some superb 20th century British religious art, but there is an ongoing struggle to keep such art in situ in churches, especially when the churches are no longer used. The story of the Oldham Mural illustrates one such struggle that succeeded. We are delighted that Howard Smith has found time to share this story with us, and hope to work further with the Twentieth Century Society in the future.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

THE HOLY ROSARY IN OLDHAM

George Mayer-Marton, who came to Britain in 1938 as an exile from Austria, created his now famous fresco and mosaic Crucifixion mural at the Church of the Holy Rosary in Fitton Hill, Oldham in 1955. It depicts Christ on the cross in mosaic in the Byzantine style, flanked by Our Lady and St John in true fresco. These figures were painted out in the 1980s by a priest but, even without them, the mural presents a dazzling figure of Christ, inspiring awe and wonder. The church closed in 2018 and has been under threat since then. The Twentieth Century

Society submitted a listing application in 2017, with another in August 2020, alongside a campaign by Save Britain's Heritage.

The Oldham Crucifixion mural is a key element in the interior of Holy Rosary; it is conceptually integrated with the architecture and other ornament to form an integrated totality, so that it can be called a modernist Gesamtkunstwerk or Total Artwork. Like other artists who worked in an ecclesiastical context at that time (for example Geoffrey Clarke, whose extraordinary Langley Cross is in nearby Middleton) Mayer-Marton was attempting to come to terms with the immense challenge of representing religious themes in a manner appropriate to the latter half of the twentieth century. In doing so, he created a work of enduring significance. Listing at Grade II was announced in August this year. Talks are now in progress with the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salford to ensure its safety and devise a sustainable future for this remarkable artwork and the building which houses it.

Howard Smith

Chair, Twentieth Century Society, Northwest



The Oldham Crucifixion mural before overpainting.
© Estate of George Mayer-Marton

FORTHCOMING TOUR PROGRAMME

2023

Articles of Faith - BRISTOL

20 February to 8 April

Victoria Methodist Church, 1A
Whiteladies Road, Bristol, BS2 1NU
Website: www.vic-methodist-bristol.org.uk

Contact: Revd Richard Sharples
richard.sharples@methodist.org.uk

New Visions - EASTBOURNE

26 May to 30 June

Emmanuel Church, Greenfield Road
Eastbourne, BN21 1JJ
Website: www.emmanueleastbourne.org.uk

Contact: Revd Paul Tabraham
contact@emmanueleastbourne.org.uk

2024

Exhibition at WELWYN GARDEN CITY

1 March to 7 April

Focolare Centre for Unity, 69 Parkway,
Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6JG
Website: www.focolare.org

Contact: Paul Gateshill
paulghill@hotmail.com

SHIELDFIELD ART WORKS' PAINTING FOR FUN

As part of the 60th anniversary celebration, a much loved Eularia Clarke painting was loaned to SAW in Shieldfield Newcastle. Shieldfield Art Works is an artist-led organisation committed to creativity, theological critique and community engagement. As a project of the Methodist Church, it is built upon Christian foundations of seeking truth, challenging injustice,

social activism and operating for the common good. Anyone, of any faith or none, is welcome to participate in its programme. Lydia Hiorns, Programme Manager at SAW said 'It was lovely to have *The Five Thousand* painting for our community to enjoy as part of our *Painting For Fun* exhibition'.



PubliCity for SAW's exhibition © SAW



Eularia Clarke's work with others in the *Painting For Fun* exhibition © Lydia Hiorns

METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION RESOURCES

Creative Spirit – Hurry while stocks last!

John N Gibbs's tribute to Sarah Middleton mentions this resource, produced to encourage group and individual exploration of eight works in the Collection depicting the Christian story. It comprised a 46 page booklet covering study sessions on each of the works with sections encouraging participants to look, respond, pray, read relevant Bible passages, and seek guidance for further reference. DVD and CD/Powerpoint discs were also included to help group leaders with presentations.

When the Collection moved its storage from Oxford Brookes University in 2019 a box of 10 copies of this resource was acquired by me as Secretary to the Friends and I have provided a temporary home for them. I would be delighted to further reduce or eliminate the stock to anyone who could make good use of a copy, perhaps in return for a small donation to the Friends. If you are interested in having a copy or know of a church leader who might want to use this resource for a local church quiet day or perhaps over next Lent and Easter study courses, then please email me at mamacfriends@btinternet.com.

Ian Baker