

Methodist **Modern**  
⊕ **Art** Collection

ANNUAL REPORT



*Report for the year ended 31 August 2015*

## WHAT IS THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION?

The Methodist Modern Art Collection comprises paintings, limited edition prints and reliefs. In the early 1960s John Morel Gibbs, a Methodist layman and art collector—realising that many Non-conformists had little appreciation of the insights that contemporary artists could bring to the Christian story—decided to create a collection of prime examples of such work that could be toured around the country. This he did, with the help of Methodist minister, the Revd Douglas Wollen. The works they acquired became the core of the present Collection—described as ‘the best denominational collection of modern art outside the Vatican’. The Collection includes leading names from the British art world of the last 100 years, such as Edward Burra, Elisabeth Frink, Eric Gill, Patrick Heron and Graham Sutherland.

In recent years the Collection has acquired works by artists from the world church, including Jyoti Sahi from India, Sadao Watanabe from Japan and John Muafangejo from Namibia. Still expanding, works by artists such as Craigie Aitchison, Peter Howson, Susie Hamilton, Clive Hicks-Jenkins and Maggi Hambling have been acquired, and today it comprises 50 paintings, prints, drawings, relief and mosaic works. The Collection is valued as a key resource for mission and evangelism, whether on a denominational or an ecumenical basis.

The Collection, in whole or in part, is available as a touring exhibition, and has travelled widely, to town and city galleries, cathedrals, churches and schools, showing at four to six venues a year. When not on tour, the Collection is stored under the care of a custodian at the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University.

The Methodist Church is the fourth largest Christian Church in Britain, after the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, and the Church of Scotland. It has more than 6,000 churches and a total membership of approximately 200,000 people. There are Methodist churches in nearly every country in the world and global membership numbers some 60 million.

— Front cover  
Richard Bavin (b.1957), *The Empty Tomb*, 2012. Watercolour  
‘The artist has sought to capture the moment just after Jesus has gone out into the garden in the warm light of the early morning’. Copyright TMCP

## EXHIBITIONS OF THE COLLECTION THIS YEAR



Junior School children fully engaged with the Collection at Banbury. Photo: Hazel Stagg

### *'War and Peace and Reconciliation'*

This was the name selected for the October 2014 exhibition in Banbury, coinciding as it did with the great interest in the Centenary of the start of the First World War. The organiser, Mike King<sup>1</sup>, reports that when he and the Revd Rob Anning, then Superintendent of the Banbury Circuit, were looking at different outreach possibilities, they wondered about using the Collection to enable conversations about faith with the wider community. 'The Trustees were extremely helpful, we found a window of opportunity and then set about getting approval and financial backing from the Circuit. The title was chosen so as to appeal to those outside the Church as well as to deepen understanding for those within.'

From the outset, it was felt important that the exhibition was owned ecumenically.

1. Former leader of the Methodist Church's World Church Relationships Team and also Vice-President of the Methodist Conference in 2012-13.

When attempts to find a more neutral public space failed, an invitation from St Mary's parish church (adjacent to Banbury Cross itself) to incorporate the exhibition within its 'Living Arts' programme was gratefully accepted. Five works were chosen to illustrate each of the three sections, with the emphasis on moving beyond war and even beyond peace to the reconciliation that lies at the heart of God—as exemplified in the life and death of Jesus. 'We started with *Cain and Abel* by John Reilly and made Jacques Iselin's stunning *The Elements of the Holy Communion* the end-piece of the exhibition, standing poignantly in the war memorial section of St Mary's.'

Mike comments further: 'It is never easy to measure success for a venture such as this, but we were encouraged to have more than 500 'official' visitors over the twenty showing days, and we know that many others looked at the works on Sundays before and after services, as well as when other 'Living Arts' events were on in the evenings. The 'official' figure refers to people to whom the stewards (volunteers from the Banbury Circuit) handed out specially-produced leaflets during the 10am to 4pm opening hours; and which provided many ways into shared conversations. Continuity was provided by Hazel Stagg, lay worker in the Circuit, who, on most days, could be found literally on her knees sketching different paintings: Hazel's input and insights were invaluable.'

The one sadness was that, despite notifying all the educational establishments in the area, only one junior school came and engaged with the paintings; their

huge enthusiasm made it all the more disappointing that others, albeit in these days of prescribed curricula, had not been able to spare the time.

Mike concludes: 'Individual paintings clearly moved many visitors and this wonderful collection of art was appreciated at so many levels. Together, the fifteen works that made up 'War and Peace and Reconciliation' enabled the Circuit to promote an enjoyable and meaningful month of conversation about God's love for the world.'

### *'Heaven and Earth'/'Nefoedd a Daear'*

Between 19 January and 26 March 2015, forty works from the Collection were exhibited in Wrexham in a partnership between the local Methodist Church and Glyndwr University. The works were divided between the 1970 town-centre church and the Oriel Sycharth Gallery of the University. The latter is located just off the main University reception area, itself decorated with tiles designed in the 1950s by Peggy Angus, one of the 20th Century's greatest ceramicists. Together they formed excellent venues for a modern art exhibition.

The coordinator of the project, the Revd Richard Sharples, envisaged the venture as an exercise in crossing boundaries 'using the arts as a common language'. The key foundation was a good relationship with the University. This was built up through Richard's chaplaincy at the Art and Design Department, and enhanced by the vision of Estelle Thompson, Head of Media, Arts and Design: 'I was thrilled at the opportunity to have such first rate works in the gallery,' commented

Professor Thompson, 'and Richard's enthusiasm for the project was infectious.'

The opening event featured music from the University and Community Choirs, and, thanks to the good offices of Professor Thompson, the exhibition was opened by Rhiannon and Mel Gooding. Rhiannon is the daughter of Ceri Richards, whose *Supper at Emmaus* was used as the iconic work for the exhibition, while her husband Mel is a leading art expert and the author of the definitive publication on Ceri Richards.

'One of the things that delighted me,' commented Richard, 'was the involvement of many students from the University's School of Art and Design; hanging the exhibition, stewarding it and working with schools.'



Great care is required when hanging Jacques Iselin's *The Elements of the Holy Communion* ahead of the exhibition of works in Wrexham. Photo: Kirsty Gaughan

Another great benefit of working with the University was the quality of publicity; especially the poster and the printed programme. At an early stage of planning, the absence of relevant resources in the Welsh language was recognised. Thus began a journey of discovery, the result of which was the publication of a bilingual leaflet 'The Methodist Modern Art Collection in Wales' (see under Resources and Publicity).

From the beginning, three strands to the project were envisaged: the exhibition itself, an events programme and a schools programme. To tie in with the University term, the events programme stretched over ten weeks, and included poetry, worship, workshops, devotional meetings, conversations, seminars, and a range of music: choral, classical and folk. There were several Welsh language events and these were sponsored by Synod Cymru, the Welsh language district of British Methodism.

The range of the events was remarkable. 'The biblical world view is that earth and heaven are mingled' reflected Richard Sharples. 'So, in the University, we've had Archimandrite Deiniol, an Orthodox Priest, helping us reflect on art as a window on eternity, and at the Church we've had John Wynn Owen of the Royal Society for Public Health, pointing to the significance of the arts for health and well-being.'

A frequent feature of exhibitions of the Collection is a 'Conversation with the Artist', and at Wrexham the Welsh artist, Clive Hicks-Jenkins, was interviewed by Trustee Meryl Doney about his work *Christ writes in the dust*, one of the more recent additions to the Collection. Clive stayed for three days, during which he led workshops for students from a local secondary school and college.

Six sessions took place with primary schools. Richard commented 'to come into the Church and find it full of school children,

all engaged with the paintings through conversation and role-play, was wonderful!'

The Church saw nearly 1,000 visitors to the exhibition, with a similar number coming to the University gallery and a further 600 people who attended one of the events. A team of 46 Stewards, from inside and outside the Church, welcomed people at both Church and (on Saturdays) at the University. The exhibition was covered in a double page spread in 'The Methodist Recorder' and a feature in both English and Welsh in the new magazine 'The connexion'.

And the legacy? The Circuit made 2015 their 'Year of the Arts', encouraging each church to hold one event which would use the arts as a way of engaging in mission with their local community.

Richard concluded 'My hope and prayer is that the future will see a continued mingling of heaven and earth as the Church is increasingly used as an arts venue, as faith and spirituality continue to find expression at the University, and as the University and Church find new ways to work together. All this, in the context of a thriving, happening, creative community here in Wrexham, as people from outside and inside the Church explore faith and meaning through the language of the arts... and to God be the glory!'

### *Ballymena welcomes the Methodist Modern Art Collection*

For this exhibition, which ran between May 11 and June 18 2015, the Collection was promoted under its own name. It was seen both as being internationally important and as having the potential to play a part in the



Revd Graham Kent interprets some of the works to visitors to the Braid Arts Centre. Copyright: Mid and E. Antrim Borough Council

process of reconciliation between the different communities in Northern Ireland. Thus it was recognised that the artists whose work is represented in the Collection come from many denominational backgrounds, and none, and have widely different perspectives on the Christian faith. What they share is an interest in the Christian story and a wish to represent their chosen subject to the best of their ability.

The exhibition was held in the splendid Braid Arts Centre in the middle of Ballymena, itself a town of 30,000 people some 25 miles north of Belfast. In the publicity within County Antrim, special importance was attached to the fact that Ballymena should have been chosen as the Collection's destination for its first ever trip across the Irish Sea. The exhibition formed part of the town's 'Year of the Artist Creative Citizens Programme'.

Starting as the initiative of the Revd Sarah Groves, of the Gracehill Moravian Church, and the Revd Maureen Hassard, of Ballymena Methodist Church, the project developed to involve nine local churches within the Ballymena Inter Church Forum.



Poet Philip Gross leading a session entitled 'Reflections of the Light: Heaven and Earth' as part of the programme in support of the Wrexham exhibition. Photo: Glyndwr University (Press Office)



Top: Revd Maureen Hassard, Councillor Billy Ashe and Revd Sarah Groves. Photo supplied.  
 Below: Part of the hang at the Braid Arts Centre, Ballymena. Photo: Christopher Neeley.  
 Copyright: Mid and E.Antrim Borough Council

The other key figure was Rosalind Lowry, Arts and Events Development Officer at the Braid. The paintings were hung in the theatre, which was converted for the purpose. Three of the larger works were placed on the ‘black box’ stage, bringing a touch of theatricality to the exhibition. The team responsible for the hang should be congratulated on their work, enabling the 1,500 visitors to the Arts Centre during the exhibition, to enjoy an excellent viewing experience.

A well-attended opening heard words of welcome, and an appreciation expressed to the Organizing Committee, from Councillor Billy Ashe, the Mayor of Mid and East Antrim and the Revd Peter Murray, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland. Over the Bank Holiday weekend of May 22–25, nine churches in the town each took a painting from the exhibition and hung it in their own worship space. There was a programme of events and the participating churches were linked by a trail. Under an ambassador scheme, 126 volunteers from all walks of life were present to talk to the public about the works. Certificates of Appreciation, in recognition of their endeavours, were presented to each of them.

It had been thought possible that the Collection might have remained in Ireland for further exhibitions in Belfast and perhaps in Dublin. In the event this did not happen, but it is hoped that, building on the success of the Ballymena venture, it will not be long before such a programme of exhibitions is arranged.

## **STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

The owner of the Collection is the Methodist Council but responsibility for its care and development is devolved to a team of curatorial trustees. The trustees normally meet three times a year—at Methodist Church House in London, at Oxford Brookes University, and, for a two-day residential meeting, at a venue which varies from year to year.

## **THE TRUSTEES**

The aims of the trustees are to care for, develop and promote the Collection, in order to encourage people to enter into conversations about God in Christ in the contemporary world and to offer material that can bring new dimensions to study, worship and spiritual life.

As part of the process of producing a consultation document (see below) we have devised a vision statement ‘The Methodist Modern Art Collection—Seeing the Spiritual’.

The trustees as of 31 August 2015 were: Dr John Gibbs (Chairman and Treasurer), Meryl Doney (Vice-Chair), the Revd Graham Kent (Secretary), Bob Williams (Secretary, Friends Group), Paul Bayley (Director of the Florence Trust), Sarah Middleton and Professor Ann Sumner (Leeds University). The Collection Custodian Dr Peter Forsaith (Research Fellow, Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History) attends meetings. Profiles of the trustees are available on the website.

### *Memorial Service for the Revd Geoff Cornell*

As reported in a footnote to the last Annual Report, trustee Geoff Cornell died suddenly on 14 October 2014—to the profound sadness of all who knew him.

An account of Geoff's life and ministry, in part as revealed in the memorial service at Hinde Street Methodist Church on 29 November, was provided in our spring Newsletter (see under Friends of the Collection—below). As a reflection of the interest that Geoff took in the Collection—and indeed of the pleasure he derived from working for it—each section of the service was accompanied by one of our paintings: two as originals and copied on the service order, the third on a postcard handed out to people as they came in. The first was *Ecce Homo* by Susie Hamilton, the second *Fool of God (Christ in the garden)* by Mark Cazalet and the third *The Raising of Lazarus* by John Reilly. In their own way each spoke to something special about Geoff.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE DURING THE YEAR**

### *Financial position*

The Methodist Church provides a budget to cover the cost of Trustees' Meetings and the Secretary's expenses. The Church also pays the insurance premium. Funds required for the work of the part-time administrator, for the care and conservation of the Collection and for the production of new interpretative material come from the income generated from the loan fees, sale of publications and so on. This income is held in a special fund at Methodist Church House and administered by the trustees (a statement of the accounts is presented at the end of this report).

Monies obtained or donated specifically for the acquisition of new works are held in the same account but monitored separately. No works were purchased during the year but two were acquired as gifts (see under Acquisitions below).

### *Links with the Methodist Connexional Team*

Our principal links are with Martin Ashford, Head of the Mission and Advocacy team, and, through him, with the members of the Communications Office. Our secretary, the Revd Graham Kent, maintains links with the Revd Gareth Powell, Assistant Secretary of Conference and Head of Conference Office<sup>2</sup>. We are indebted to members of

—  
2. Gareth Powell took up the position of Secretary of Conference on Sept 1st 2015. He was followed as Assistant Secretary by the Revd Helen Cameron



Postcards from one of the newly available packs of ten. Photo: Bob Williams

the Finance Team for their assistance with our financial affairs.

### *Administrative support*

The trustees have a contract with the Enfield Circuit of the Methodist Church whereby the circuit administrator, Mary Roseweir, spends an average of four hours a week working on behalf of the Collection. Mary has a considerable knowledge of the nature and purpose of the Collection, and of the work of the trustees. She makes arrangements for the Trustees' Meetings and writes the minutes.

### *Care for the Collection*

The constraints posed by the very limited storage space on the Harcourt Hill campus of Oxford Brookes University were alleviated by entering into an agreement with the

National Conservation Service to keep some of the works at its store at Upper Heyford, 10 miles north of Oxford. No major conservation work was carried out on the Collection during the year.

### *Resources and Publicity*

'A Guide to the Methodist Art Collection', published in 2010, continues to sell well, as does the DVD/CD and study booklet 'Creative Spirit' which focuses on eight works from the Collection. It is intended for leaders of worship, house and other groups. A very limited stock remains of the scholarly 'Catalogue of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art' by Roger Wollen. This was published by the trustees in 2003 and provides a remarkable insight into the history of the Collection up

until 2000. During the year 10 new packs of postcards were produced, each containing 10 cards of the same picture.

All these publications are available for purchase from the Methodist Publishing list at Norwich Books and Music. Further details can be found at [www.methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk).

Through an arrangement with the Wales Synod, Synod Cymru and the Discipleship and Ministries Learning Network (DMLN) of the Methodist Church, a bilingual booklet on the connections between the Collection and Wales was produced in time for the Wrexham exhibition of the Collection (see above). This was written by trustee Sarah Middleton and translated into Welsh by Delyth Wyn Davies. It will be used at other exhibitions of the Collection in Wales, such as that at Llandudno in Summer 2016.

The high quality design and publication values of the recent Annual Reports are the result of an extremely generous commitment of resources by Phil Allison, Managing Director of Cultureshock Media, a design group which promotes the visual arts at the highest level. Trustee Bob Williams worked most effectively with Phil's team on this project. Sufficient copies of the 2014 Report were produced for it to be widely distributed at the Methodist Conference at Southport in June and it has been very well received. It is available on our web pages (see back cover).

A contribution on the Collection was invited at 'Mission-shaped Heritage', a major inter-disciplinary research conference hosted by Methodist Heritage over three days at Cliff College, Derbyshire, in July 2015. Trustee

Sarah Middleton gave a plenary session talk entitled 'Seeing the Spiritual', tracing the development of Methodism's relationship with the visual arts, with a focus on the Collection and the mission opportunities it has presented over 50 years.

### **Consultation: 'Shaping a Future Together'**

During the autumn of 2014, under the leadership of trustees Sarah Middleton and Ann Sumner, we produced a consultation document 'Shaping a Future Together'; this being a follow-up to the 'Visioning Day' of the previous year. A copy of this document can be found on the web pages (see back cover for details).

In April 2015, it was sent out to 142 people who had hosted an exhibition of the Collection or been involved with it in some other way. From the responses, a number of key points emerged:

- Keep the Collection touring.
- Ensure that the Collection has a long-term home where there is display space and opportunity for study (as noted above, the Collection is currently in storage when not on tour. There is no suitable exhibition space and some works have to be stored off site).
- Secure the services of a dedicated staff member, especially to work on promotion of the Collection (including via the website, use of social media and through the production of a film or TV programme).
- Enhance the Collection by acquiring new works.

- Develop and strengthen strategic partnerships (responses from officers of 'Methodist Women in Britain', 'Methodist Heritage' and 'Artserve' showed that our partnership was warmly welcomed by all three bodies.)  
The trustees are grateful for the thoughtful responses received (see also Plans for future periods).

### **Friends of the Collection**

The Secretary to the Friends, Bob Williams, reports: 'The number of subscribing Friends remains more-or-less static at 71. We have, sadly, reported on the death of three of our loyal members, but also welcomed some new Friends from all points of the United Kingdom. In one instance a completed application arrived accompanied by a very generous donation for which we were enormously grateful. Gift Aiding also remains critically important to our income stream.'

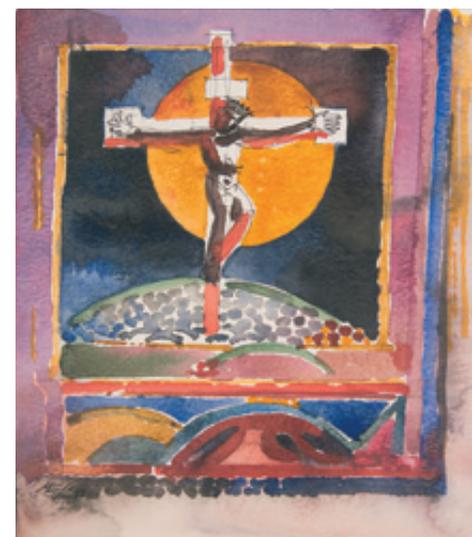
'As Newsletter Editor I am delighted that we have managed to maintain a 'fatter' publication (16 pages) for the past two years. I am hopeful that, with an increasing number of contributions from further afield, this can be maintained. Our aim is to report on the Collection and its travels, together with associated features of interest, and the wider horizon where art and faith interconnect'. Back numbers of the Newsletter can be viewed on our web pages (see back cover for details).

### **Acquisitions**

No works were purchased during the year. However two paintings were accepted into the Collection. The first was an anonymous

gift of the large watercolour *The empty tomb* by Richard Bavin (see front cover) and was given in memory of the Revd Geoff Cornell. This painting had been one of the works by living artists exhibited alongside key pictures from the Collection in 'Risen', the 2013 exhibition organised by Rupert Otten of Monnow Valley Arts (see Annual Report for 2013). It had made a big impression on Geoff and its acquisition makes fitting recognition of his work for the Collection.

The second was a small watercolour *The Crucifixion* painted by Michael Edmonds in 1988. Michael died in 2014 (see Annual Report for that year) and his family offered the painting to the trustees in recognition of his close connection with the Collection over the years. We were glad to accept. It will form part of our research collection and not normally go on tour.



Michael Edmonds, *Crucifixion*, 1988. Watercolour. Copyright TMCP

### *Relationships with other bodies*

Most of our exhibitions are organized on an ecumenical basis, giving us contact with many denominations. Through our trustees, in particular Graham Kent, Meryl Doney and Paul Bayley, we have good links with many other bodies concerned with the relationships between art and religion.

Our links with Oxford Brookes University are maintained via our Custodian Dr. Forsaith. We are very pleased to welcome Susan Howdle to some of our meetings. Susan Howdle is a member of the Board of Governors of the university and also chairs the Westminster College Oxford Trust (WCOT), a body which is appointed by the Methodist Conference and which oversees Methodist interests on the site.

With two much valued works by Eularia Clarke in the Collection, we were very pleased to make contact with the members of her family who, in the centenary of her birth, were establishing a Trust to make her work more widely known ([www.eulariaclarke.com](http://www.eulariaclarke.com)). More information on our links with the artist and her family can be found in the autumn 2014 issue of our Newsletter (see under Friends of the Collection—above).

### **PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS**

We have an exciting programme of exhibitions planned over the next year or so. In chronological order, venues will include the Epworth Old Rectory in Lincolnshire—where John Wesley was born—Lincoln, Ealing, Llandudno and Bath.

During this year we particularly valued our partnership with Glyndwr University in Wrexham, and the trustees are keen to develop their partnerships with other centres of higher education. Also, this year, we were delighted to work with the Braid Arts Centre, and we have the intention of further developing our links with the museum and gallery sector. The writing of an audience development plan will be an important part of this work.

Despite our efforts with the consultation document, the responses have come mainly from within Methodism and in order to broaden our reach and hear more from galleries, other collections and the art world in general, we have decided to conduct focus groups at some of our exhibition venues during 2016.

Following various informal discussions with members of the Connexional team and others involved in the leadership of the Methodist Church, we will be exploring the possibility of securing resources for the further promotion of the Collection.

With the help of the team at Cultureshock Media and our colleagues in the Connexional team, we will be developing a range of initiatives aimed at increasing the profile of the Collection. These will include bringing to fruition our work on improving our web presence and investigating the idea of making a film of the Collection while it is on show at a suitable venue.

John Newton Gibbs (Chairman)  
March 2016

## **METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION**

### Income and Expenditure Account

<b>INCOME (£)</b>	Year ending 31 Aug 2015	Year ending 31 Aug 2014
Sale of literature, loan fees, grants and donations	4,210.58	13,119.40
Interest	101.71	85.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,303.47</b>	<b>13,195.32</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE (£)</b>		
Production of interpretative material, Conservation work	8,325.47	3,885.66
Surplus for the Year	(4,022.18)	9,233.74
<b>Balance B/Fwd 1 September</b>	<b>20,410.36</b>	<b>11,176.62</b>
<b>Balance C/Fwd 31 August</b>	<b>16,388.18</b>	<b>20,410.36</b>

For information on the Collection, please visit the Art Collection pages on the Methodist Church website [www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection](http://www.methodist.org.uk/artcollection) or search under 'Methodist Modern Art Collection'. Sub-headings include: Browse the Collection, Borrowing the Collection, Exhibition Dates, Friends of the Collection, Trustees.  
Alternatively, contact the administrator at the following address:

Southgate Methodist Church  
The Bourne  
London N14 6RS  
020 8886 8067 or  
e-mail [methodistart@yahoo.com](mailto:methodistart@yahoo.com)



Poster adopted for the 'Heaven and Earth'/  
'Nefoedd a Daear' exhibition:  
Wrexham 2015