

# Overview of Section I

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FULL OVERVIEW  
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**St. Paul's, Bow Common continues to reveal its 'Nearness to Need'**

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## Appendix:

### 50 years later and more, the genius of the building continues to be discovered ..

Earlier in this account we had heard from Gerald Adler that:

<sup>29</sup> (Keith Murray) '*enrolled at the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, the design School co-founded by the Arts and Crafts architect **William Richard Lethaby** (1857-1931), who was to be influential for Maguire & Murray, and from whom their future practice's slogan '**nearness to need**' would derive ..*' and

.... <sup>29</sup> '*The values of Maguire and Murray were those of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, with its respect for all kinds of proper making, informed by hand and eye, in the building trades as in pottery, textiles or lettering. The phrase '**nearness to need**' used by W. R. Lethaby became their motto, as Maguire explained in his lecture at the RIBA in 1971.*'

In 1971 in the article 'Nearness to Need' in the RIBA Journal of 1971, Robert Maguire said this: '**We have an ordinary conviction that architecture is about people ... not merely that its purpose is to serve people at a high level of usefulness and comfort, plus some extra ingredient which makes it look nice. Architecture is concerned with human need.**

*This then is what we have clarified as our basic conviction: that the primary object of the creative architectural process is to achieve – to use Lethaby's phrase – "nearness to need". We have established this as a kind of lifeline, by which we have found we can return to a point of reference & take our bearings again amid the confusion complexity of the architectural currents in which we have to work ...'*

In the 1960' Rayner Banham established a link between industrial design and architecture – a pragmatic link in a way. He claimed that William Lethaby (died 1931) found inspiration in engineered objects who even in an earlier era had frequently turned to objects such as railway viaducts and bicycles whose value lay .. '**in their nearness to need.**'

That one small area of Bow Common had seen enormous changes since the middle of the C19, as has been seen in earlier parts of the historical section above. From countryside, to agricultural land, to urban sprawl, destroyed and then rebuilt post-War, not only had Bow Common changed unrecognisably but so had society. As seen earlier, even when the first St. Paul's, Bow Common was built and even through its short heyday, most people did not go to church. However, the church held a fixed status and function in society.

Each of the two World Wars brought a significant shake-up of society and after the Second World War the place of the church in society was radically changed, both through an increased secularisation of society and through a large incoming Muslim population – but nothing unusual about this as the East End had seen large numbers of incoming Irish and then Jewish people, followed by large numbers (including myself and my family) from the sub-continent. In my own time in Bow Common I noticed at bus stops that the early Sylheti conversations around me were steadily changing to Russian and Polish. One of the extraordinary things about the East End for me is the huge melting pot that it has become and what a rich diversity that is (but then I would say that as an immigrant!).

The ambient culture of the area had always been changing, once London's expanding population began to reach out to the 'east' and as has been seen, even with an incoming indigenous population spreading into this area there were great changes of social class. The 'nuisance' of industrial pollution, as well as general overcrowding, as already seen, pushed out the more prosperous citizens to more 'sympathetic' areas leaving a poorer population generally.

My 18 years as parish priest of Bow Common were a short period in that area against the wider background of its overall history, but even within that time there have been visible changes in the parish, not only of population but also of new housing and a new demographic beginning to establish itself, of people owning or even part-renting/part-owning their property.

The **'needs,'** therefore, even since the church was built, have changed greatly from the needs and practices observed by Maguire and Murray in the mid 1950's, first of all in that church hall with all the liturgical experimentation of a priest and his congregation without a church and around which they designed the remarkable building which still stands in that place.

Liturgically, the needs remain broadly similar to what they observed coming into being - now well established across most of the churches, especially after the revolution wrought by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council in the 1960's, with St. Paul's, Bow Common actually ahead of the 'game' in its early days! But what has changed enormously since the church was built has been the rest of the life of the parish and, perhaps, the world at large. The church was built very clearly and purely on then- radical liturgical principles. Indeed, this remains the primary purpose of the church, to be the centre of the liturgical life of those who gather there week by week. Within that primary purpose it has been extraordinary how liturgically flexible the space has been and what it has made possible, certainly within my own experience.

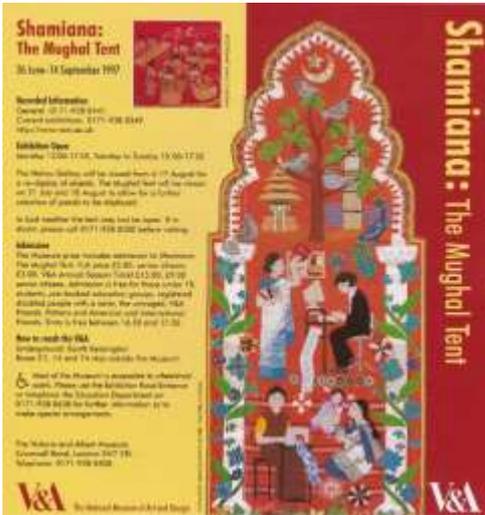
However, whereas the churches had an independent and well-defined place in local communities for over a century, as they have lost the status they once held, in many ways churches have actually been freed up to work in greater partnership with others in the community, in addition to their primary liturgical function. One of the strengths of the way the Church of England works is that a parish church and its ministers and ministry are there not just to serve the congregation which worships in the building, but has a care and a 'cure of souls' which extends to the whole parish and to whoever lives within it, of any faith or none. I made a point earlier how the chief lay 'officers' of the church - the churchwardens - are elected annually not just by those on the church's electoral roll but, potentially, by anyone on the civil electoral roll of the parish. They and the parish clergy and the people have (or should have!) a sense of responsibility and service and ministry to the whole parish. The life and the business of the parish and what goes on within it is recognised as being the business and the concern of the parish church and especially of its ministers and officers.

The majority of churches are aware of this and do their best to fulfil this wider relationship with the parish, within their resources and availability of clergy and congregation and, especially, to whatever extent their church design and availability enables this. To be honest, my early years in the church were not easy. It took time to be understood and trusted and to be less tightly constrained in whatever I did which was interpreted as changing the well-established traditions and liturgy that I found on arrival. I followed an incumbency of 43 years, after all, and the church had the smallest church electoral roll in the Diocese, so fears were present, but more than matched by a strong and feisty spirit! My first three years were a bit grim and something of a blur and so it was hard to 'see' the building and its potential.

In my latter months at the church I began to populate the website but never did finish the task. Most of what is now in this account would have appeared there but I retired before I had even written any of this! However, if the church website still contains this information, this link witnesses to what was a turning point in many ways:

<http://www.stpaulsbowcommon.org.uk/about-our-church/a-ve'ry-flexible-space/the-next-chapter-begins-1/> . This tells the story of '**Shamiana.**'

The core of this story is of a wonderful exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum which I went to see reluctantly, even with a free ticket! It was called '**Shamiana - The Moghul Tent**' and was a beautiful and moving exhibition of textile panels housed in a tent, such as the Mughal emperors used when they toured their territories. This was the outcome of a textile project which had begun in Stepney and Bow Common with Bengali women in our area and then expanded to become a global project with women involved all over the world, whose work was gathered together in 1998 at the V&A.

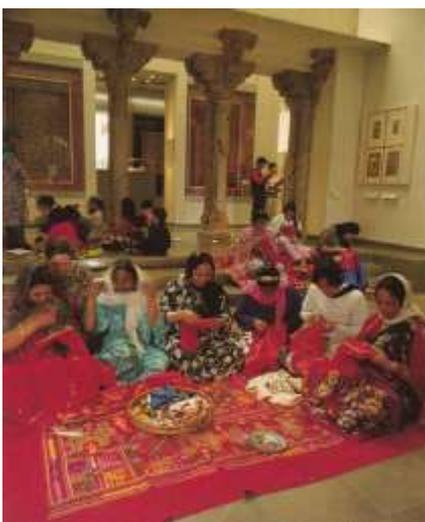


I was deeply moved by it when I saw the exhibition at the V & A, but also deeply frustrated. Most Londoners, including most who live in our area, never go anywhere near the great Museums in their own city. This project had begun in our area, started by a community worker, Shireen Akbar, I had known and worked with personally in the early years of my ministry in Stepney, but who sadly died just 3 months before the exhibition opened at the V & A. But people in our area were extremely unlikely to get to see it. In fact I was furious and wrote a frustrated letter to the Director of the Nehru Gallery, in which the exhibition was being shown in a large Mughal tent in the garden of the V & A.

With extraordinary spirit and courage, the remarkable Director of the Nehru Gallery, Dr. Deborah Swallow, agreed to my idea of transferring the whole exhibition from the grandeur of the Victoria and Albert to an unknown parish church in the heart of London's East End, to be shown in the church - in fact, to show more than they had space to show in the V & A tent. Brave lady! To my mind, one of the core lessons which the Shamiana Project demonstrated so powerfully is that art and creativity are not some elitest activity but part of the potential of every human being - in this case several of the South Asian women of our area, initially, and then ordinary (but extraordinary) women all over the world. For me, Shamiana also demonstrated that art can inspire and elicit art from whoever encounters it. Thus, having been impressed and amazed by beautiful expressions of their own culture, of which they had never known anything much, on the very floor of the V & A, women sat in the presence of that art and created their own art (as seen below). Not only was I asking for the church to become gallery space for this exhibition but also for it to be possible for visitors, having seen the Shamiana panels to be able to create their own art in the church before they left.



Shireen Akbar



The prospect was terrifying and at first sight was in violation of all the strictures which had been laid upon me by the 'old guard' core of the church - they even invented a phrase, 'the integrity of the walls' to prevent me even from putting up a poster! So what chance did I stand of filling the church walls with 30 beautiful textile panels? But, it felt so right and, in a very unexpected way, solidly aligned with the views and ideas about the people of the parish which Fr. Kirkby had held and now shared by those who succeeded him.

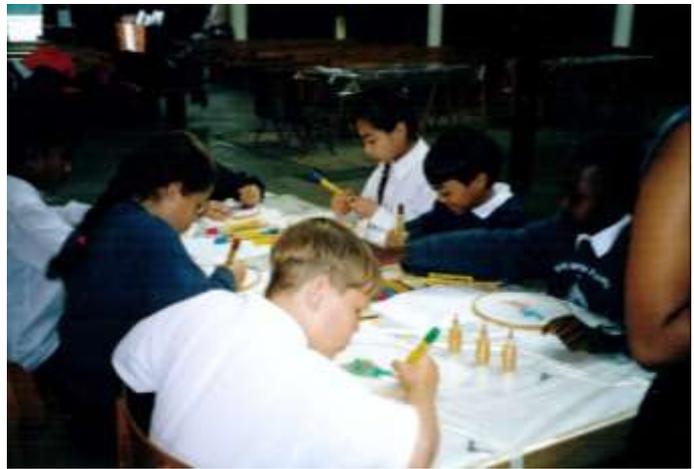
The church was not mine, however, and without the agreement of ALL church members I would not go ahead, on principle. However, in the spirit of Fr. Kirkby, being radicals and fully understanding the importance of the 'local' in our church life and purpose, they took a deep breath - but they fully understood what I was saying. They agreed that such a creative project which was born in our area -people's art of high quality and not an elitist exhibition - and started among our immigrant community, had to be seen in our area, and where better than in our church? Remarkably, it was superbly and unintentionally apt as a large exhibition space, though no-one had ever seen it that way before!



On my part this was all pure accident and I take no credit for having any kind of 'vision' of these possibilities! Had I not reluctantly used the free ticket to the exhibition (as I was sore tempted not too as I was too busy) none of the things which followed from Shamiana may ever have developed! Or not in the way they did.

The core group of 'old-timers' came with me to the V & A and we had endless discussions, but they 'got' it! A vital part of the church's ministry was to the whole parish and this was a celebration of what local Bengali women had created, initially, and then women far beyond the parish, but inspired by the creative skills of our local women. If the older core of the church could not own this then it was not going to happen, but they joined me in the huge risk and the new adventure in the use of a building once defined as a 'liturgical machine'!

It then became intensely scary as this was totally new territory into which we had stumbled and my neck was on the line! Looking back, I have no idea how and where I raised the thousands of pounds of funding needed but we did not take a penny from the V & A and in fact sold their postcards and raised money for them! A large part of the budget was to hire in some community artists to be there every day to invite visitors to create their own small pieces of textile art in a variety of techniques in which they tutored them. We needed therefore to buy



the best quality silk and textile art materials with which to celebrate our visitors' creativity. This proved to be a highly successful and popular element of the event, not only for groups from schools, community centres, elders' clubs and the like, but also single visitors, both adults and children.



As a spin-off there were some local secondary school boys who came in every lunchtime – in spite of their conditioning that this was sissy 'girls' stuff! – and made some very fine and skilled pieces! The textile tutors spotted this and overheard the boys comments that all these panels had been made by females so what about male creativity! They all seemed to be members of a youth club – almost entirely of Bengali young people – in Wapping. I worked with the textile tutors to

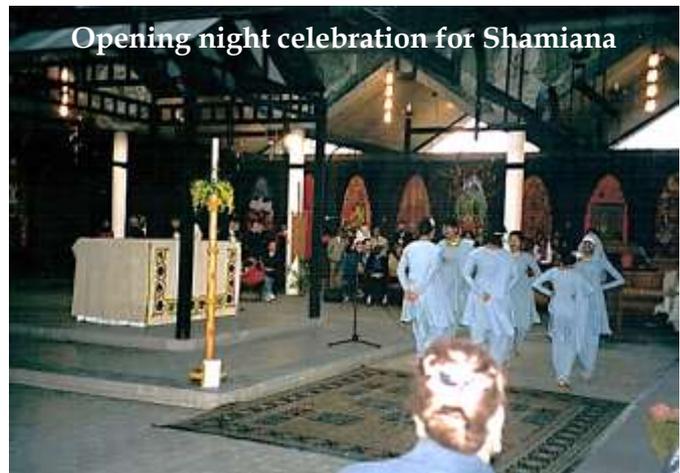
challenge them to a project to make a large textile work in their club and raised several thousand pounds more. In fact there was enough for a panel to be made by the boys and another by the girls of the club.



They had no idea that the church was behind any of this and I was able to slip in, incognito to watch them at work in their highly skilled chaotic way! In fact their panels were designed to be part of the Stitches in Time Millennium Tapestry project which had now arisen out of the Shamiana exhibition of the church, in 'Bayeux Tapestry' style, telling the 2000 year story of Tower Hamlets from the Romans onwards. The boys chose to depict the years of the Black Death with a very striking textile panel with a large skeleton at the centre, complete with a gold tooth and mobile phone and large, beautiful and almost jeweled fleas which had carried the plague! Very boy-like! The girls' panel, by contrast, were ordered and geometrical and also very fine, depicting the many door fronts of Brick Lane.

As we prepared to open the exhibition in church there were further risks. Here was an Asian immigrant Vicar filling a church with wall hangings made by immigrants or foreigners abroad, most of whom were not even Christians, with large banners in Bengali hanging outside the church. There could have been a backlash from the very strong right wing groups around.

On the day the exhibition opened a right wing racist candidate was elected to the Borough Council at local elections. It was a worrying time. The largest element of the funding, therefore, was for two security personnel who attended every session and patrolled discretely - two lovely men who were never needed! In the event the church proved to be a superb venue for such an event & many hundreds



Opening night celebration for Shamiana

came over the weeks of the exhibition.

One Saturday morning I was in the church and saw a man clearly much moved to tears, standing by the organ console. Every day there were people deeply moved by the beauty and also the meaning of what was on display, which was a good reason to be in the church as much as I could. I sat with the man and spoke with him and then, to my deep shock and then consternation, discovered that this was Bob Maguire! I had never met him before. My immediate fear was that was deeply upset by such a 'violation' of his sacred building, designed solely as a liturgical space, being 'misused' in such a way.

The church was fully in support of this, including Keith Murray whom I also included as one of those who had to be in support and who came on visits and was enthusiastic for the idea.

*Shamiana was planned to visit 13 exhibition spaces in the UK and abroad. It was Bow Common and Dubai that showed the second largest number of panels (30) together in one place! Even in the tent at the V & A they had to cycle through all 56 panels.*

Shamiana: The Mughal Tent	
Exhibition Tour Venues (from June 1997 until December 2000)	
<b>VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM</b> Cromwell Road, LONDON Tent and 56 panels	26 June - 14 September 1997
<b>ROYAL MUSEUM OF SCOTLAND</b> Chambers Street, EDINBURGH 14 panels	10 October - 8 December 1997
<b>RAGGED SCHOOL MUSEUM</b> 46-50 Copperfield Road, LONDON 4 panels	14 January - 28 March 1998
<b>WORLD TRADE CENTRE</b> DUBAI, United Arab Emirates 20 panels	17 March - 23 March 1998
<b>ST PAUL'S CHURCH</b> Bow Common, LONDON 30 panels	7 May - 27 May 1998
<b>ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM</b> Kilvingrose, GLASGOW 40 panels	9 October 1998 - 4 January 1999
<b>SLOUGH MUSEUM</b> 278/280 High Street, SLOUGH 12 panels	1 March - 20 April 1999

All I knew was that Bob Maguire lived in a fairly remote part of Scotland and it was a shock now to see him here! Surely he must hate this misuse of 'his' church! In fact, he was deeply moved at what this church which he had created with Gresham and Keith could do and which he had never foreseen – but then nor had I! Clearly here was a need for the creativity of local people to be celebrated, especially in an area which was seldom celebrated, including the not totally welcome immigrant population, and this building had shown its 'nearness' to that need.

Bob Maguire and I got to know one another well, almost entirely by e-mail and letter – we only ever met once more in 2012 when he and his wife Alison came to the retrospective exhibition of Charles Lutyens' life's work, including his remarkable 'Outraged Christ,' (see below). Shamiana, in 1998, led to a great deal of exploration of the 'nearness' of this extraordinary building to the many, varied and even passing, needs of our community.



Bob & Alison Maguire  
2012

Twelve years later we had a major celebration of the first 50 years of the church, at which I earnestly wished Bob to be present, Keith, very sadly, having died four years previously. In the event, at the last moment family commitments sadly prevented him from being there but in the run up to the celebrations (there were two of them!) I wrote him a very long review of how things had changed since he built the church and – more importantly – a 'confession' of what we had continued to do with his building after Shamiana, and of which he had no idea until that moment! I feared his displeasure but instead he was delighted at all of this!

In fact, this letter is a useful precis of the changing situation and needs of that area and so the bulk of it follows (interspersed with a lot of useful illustrations!), as does Bob Maguire's response.

'March 7<sup>th</sup> 2010

Dear Bob,

*Herewith a long overdue letter (alas, at considerable length!) which gathers together a collection of all kinds of things which I have had in mind over quite a period of time to share with you.*

*But first things first!*

### **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations:**

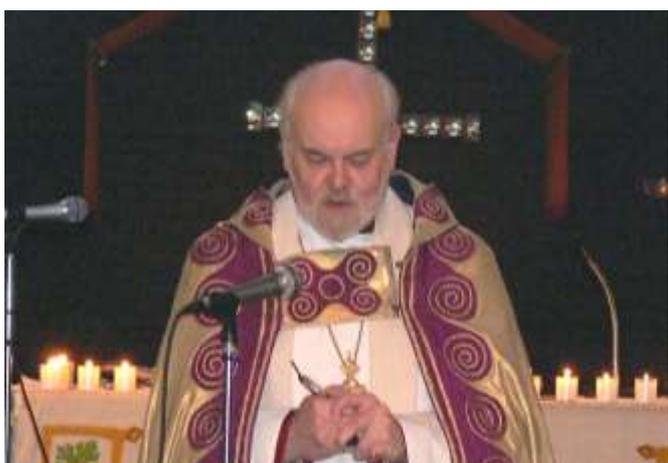
*Not what I had intended, but as a consequence of the complex lives of our bishops, the marking of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of this church is going to be a 'double-headed' event on two successive days, each with a different emphasis. Explanation follows!*

*It feels right to us that a bishop should be leading the anniversary celebrations and, in particular, the Bishop of London. Two years ago I approached him with the date of the Dedication as the one and only date for such an event. I was warned even at that early stage that Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April is a Bank Holiday Friday and that the Bishop of London had no other booking in his diary but did not usually take bookings on a Bank Holiday Friday in case he wanted to get away with his family! The diary was firmed up at the beginning of this year and – behold – it was so, that he could offer Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> April but not the day itself! It felt right that 50 years on a Bishop of London should be involved and I realised that of course 29<sup>th</sup> April has a certain significance, in that the first half century of the church's life is completed on that day.*

*We thought this through and adopted a classic Anglican compromise which was to have the best of both worlds – a main service led by the Bishop of London on the completion of the first 50 years of this building's life followed by a much more informal, and local celebration led by the Bishop of Stepney or myself. This will mark the first day of the next 50 years of the church's story and will be more forward looking and homespun.'*

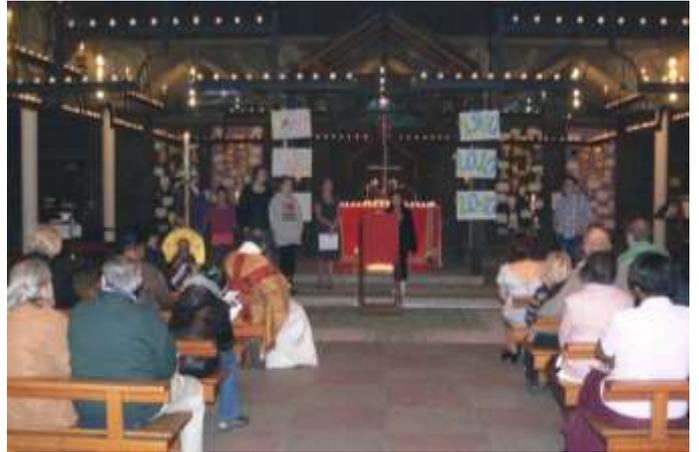
*(In the event the Bishop of Stepney was unable to be present for personal reasons and so I led those celebrations.)*

50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2010



50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010





## 'The present context

*There are two main things going on with us at the moment – one internal and one major external development.*

*This October will see me being here as incumbent for 15 years. What I inherited was an amazing legacy, in the form of the church building and a small group of people who carried and embodied much of what Gresham had stood for and envisioned in the 43 years in which he had been at Bow Common. You, more than most, will know how remarkable Gresham was and I ensure always that visitors do not just see the building in terms of Maguire and Murray but also of Kirkby.*

*However, what I also inherited was a very fragile situation. There was an understandable (and considerable) fear of the future and of change and a fear that the vision would be lost. Things were every tough indeed for the first three years – but none of that down to Gresham. In his last 15 years or so Gresham was faced with small numbers in a large building, with very little income, no children or young people and his great vision of the Kingdom not yet becoming the kind of reality that he and his fellow visionaries had hoped for. Most of those who had journeyed with him through those earlier days of liturgical evolution before the new church was built, and whose actual liturgical practice so influenced what you were to build were now gone and had not been replaced. He himself witnesses to how tough those final years were.*

*By then Gresham had also developed quite a rigid baptismal policy, for instance, with less than half a dozen children baptised in his last dozen years or so and it was hard for people to find a 'way in' – though that tiny congregation (the smallest electoral roll in the Diocese) was always welcoming. So much was changing in the community and those coming into the area were either of another faith or completely unchurched. For all sorts of reasons things were very fragile then and even in the short time between Gresham's departure and my own arrival, the liturgy was further developed and used as an inflexible instrument to which any successor was to be strictly and inflexibly held. One of the very knowledgeable post-Gresham liturgists even called himself a 'liturgical terrorist' with whom there could be no negotiation!*

*It was a troubled time when I came here and there was grave suspicion that I was a 'lackey of the bishop' (I quote from things written at the time) and was here to overturn all that was precious and of value to the church. I hung in with it all and recognized from the beginning the remarkable dedication and commitment of those people who, thanks to Gresham, had a firm understanding of the Gospel and of the Kingdom, such as I had seldom seen – though behaving defensively because they were afraid and vulnerable. Now, fifteen years later, all of this is well in the past and the pain and suspicions of those first three years have long since gone and I dare to say that we mostly act with agreement and consensus and have made real progress.*

*Perhaps the one event which proved the first major turning point was the one you witnessed in 1998 (the 'Shamiana' exhibition exported from the V & A) when the 'older core' of the church took a huge risk in allowing such a thing to happen in this over-protected space and found how amazing their building truly is in what it can enhance and embrace. In time new people did come, not driven by faith but by the desire to get their kids into our church school – or to get their kids baptised after earlier refusal by Fr. Kirkby! However, many of them stayed and began to form the new core of the church – but with a very different outlook in a very different population and culture from that of the 50's and 60's. Times have changed!*

*Since then a number of children have come and grown up and moved on with new ones taking their place. Our children are a major part of our life now and several whom I have baptised are now turning into teenagers and sticking with the church. It is their home in a very easy and natural way and they really will have 'ownership' one day! Thus it was a few months ago that I looked out on a Sunday morning on this wonderful group of people and realised that something remarkable was before me.'*

*In that one place, Sunday by Sunday, we have three people who were there with you at the Dedication of the church fifty years ago, alongside a number of young people who stand a good chance of being present at the Centenary, fifty years hence – even as past members invited back for the occasion!*

*I was extremely moved as we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the Foundation Stone in 2008, that there were four people there fifty years on, including one 65 year old who as a 15 year old had carried the cross on that day and who, when I realised that, was invited to carry the same cross fifty years later to the day and to the hour!*



*It is not at all fanciful to imagine Harry and Miriam and Keira and Joel, fifty years hence, witnessing to their memories of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and of having personally known three people who had been present at the Dedication of the church a century before! Over these years, without exception, every single child we have known, even for a while, seems to be turning into excellent young adults – one or two now in their twenties and still regarding this as ‘their’ church with much affection though having moved on in life and most no longer come.*

*Thus it occurred to me that there are two things going on when we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and I want these both to be reflected in the two celebrations. Quite rightly we must give thanks for the past 50 years and for all who have served faithfully in that time and for those, such as yourself, whose vision we now inherit and inhabit. That seems to be the right thing to celebrate as we complete the first 50 years on 29<sup>th</sup> April. However, there is much to anticipate with hope in those to whom we will be handing on this extraordinary and precious legacy for the future.*

*And so on the first day of the next 50 years (and the Anniversary of Dedication) I have asked the young people to lead us into that future. They will share with us a little of their own hopes and visions for what that future may be. In each of the services they will have a part – in reading or sharing the intercessions but on 30<sup>th</sup> April I want them to have a bit of a voice. On that ‘next 50 years’ day I also want the Bishop (if there – or myself, if he is not) to rededicate the building as it was dedicated 50 years previously – blessing the fabric of the building and lighting new consecration candles – with 14 people lighting them chosen from past & present, including (if she is willing) the now adult woman who, as a child, lit the candles on the walls fifty years ago.*

*The other piece of context which makes the past and future elements to the two services seem appropriate, is the leading edge – already begun – of an enormous amount of change in this area, in the form of the virtual re-invention of much of St. Paul’s Way over a period of ten years. All around us are cranes! New housing seems to be popping up everywhere, as well as a lot of improved social provision – such as a new St. Paul’s Way secondary school now being completed, a major new health centre and community centre and hundreds of new homes throughout the parish – as many as 700 or so.*

*Of course, some of this hasn’t been thought out, such as what on earth all the new children are going to do for schooling or where adults will shop or have access to other infrastructure. Your comments come back to me about Anne McEwan’s discarded attempt to carefully plan the surroundings of the church way back in the early days and the mess which actually followed. A walk about the parish shows the totally disjointed and unrelated way in which town ‘planning’ has proceeded ever since then and continues to do so!*

*On St. Paul’s Way a few years ago it was realised, rather accidentally, that four or five major unconnected developments were being planned by independent and unrelated bodies and that this kind of un-joined-up regeneration has, in earlier times, produced many of the problems with which we now have to live and so perhaps all these bodies needed to talk to one another and plan in relation to one another. At the earliest stage our church was seen as a trusted partner in all of this. Fifteen years of building relations on the road has begun to ‘pay off’ and it is recognized that we are the only ‘agency’ in this community which is here for the long run – and, indeed, the only agency to see through 150 years in this place.’*

*'(I inherited nothing at all about the first St. Paul's, Bow Common and had to rediscover the story of that place and of this area, to the extent that we celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the consecration of that first church in the same year as we celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the laying of the Foundation Stone just two months later. None of this back-story to the church was 'in the air' but I have made sure that it now is.)*

*Over the past three years, therefore, we have been 'much involved in a community partnership which has sought to ensure that unconnected bodies such as the PCT, the Local Authority, the Education Departments of the Diocese and of the Borough, the local Housing Association and so on speak with each other and try to join up the planning as much as is possible among such classically independent bodies. Our part in this was to undertake a very thorough congregational and community audit.*

*We sampled what people on the street thought about this area. The best, the worst, the dreams, the expectations, the experiences etc. were noted and analysed and formed the basis of our own plan of action for the next decade or so. It did also come to the attention of the Diocese who then began to take what was going on here really quite seriously.*

*Ideally the Church should be seen as an equal community partner (sorry to keep using that word but it does seem to apply here!) but historically there has been a lot of firmly set wariness of all and any faith groups getting involved in such ways.*

*It is accepted now that this church is not 'dangerous' or 'suspect' but co-operative and actively welcoming of local groups and was to be taken seriously. As part of our community audit we invited a number of local agencies to a Forum which we held in the church, to share the findings of our audits and to ask what these agencies themselves saw as the challenges and opportunities in this area, where they are all engaged in one*



Agencies Forum July 2008

*way or another. About 22 such agencies turned up, many of whom had never met each other before – they included the three schools on the street, several children's nurseries, playgroups and other such bodies, Age Concern and workers with the elderly, the community centre, artists, mental health agencies, police etc. I have a great team who helped make all this possible and this did a great deal not only for us to be seen as no-strings partners in the community but also as a group which had the remarkable asset of an extraordinary building!*

*We have made it clear from the beginning that one of our great resources is the church building and the more limited resource of the church hall and are very open to sharing these with the rest of the parish as inclusively as possible (see later). The upshot of this has been a rare coming together of the Diocese of London and the local Housing Company (HARCA) to jointly provide funding for three people to assist me (only with a few hours per week!) in seeing how we can open this building more to those who live in this community. This has not been done before and there is close and keen interest to see whether this kind of co-operation can be modeled elsewhere, both in the Diocese and in the country at large. The leading light in all of this is an enterprising man - Lord Andrew Mawson. I have known Andrew for nearly 30 years and he does get things done but often single-mindedly – but so far he has been manageable!*



*There is a lot of change already appearing around us and we will be engaging with all of that through the next generation of PCC members, churchwardens etc., some of whom may well be some of the young ones in our midst or, indeed, their children.'*

*' My worry has been that in the process of embracing the future (though I shall see little of it as I retire in three years' time!) we will lose sight of the past history of this patch. Indeed, I have found that there is no knowledge of even fairly recent post-War past history of this locality except among the few 70- and 80-year olds in our midst. And so, this year during Lent I have been having 'outdoor' Lent groups! The parish neatly divides into four quadrants and on four Saturdays we go on a two hour walk, each time exploring each of the quadrants.*

*Armed with an OS Map of 1914 (when the pre-War parish was at or just past its peak of well-being), arms-full of old photographs and information and memoirs, Booth's Victorian poverty maps of the area, and a couple of people who knew the parish just after the War, we have traced what was here, observed what is here now & goggled at the buildings being erected even now & the plans of those yet to come. Only a few have come each time but they have been fascinated and all of this is being laid down (digitally!) as an archive and being put on the history wall in church (a growing display of all of this from the 18<sup>th</sup> C right up to your own building & all that we shall be celebrating next month). I really do want to give some historical context to all this change breaking out around us & I know that even though more interested in computer games and hanging out with their mates, our young ones are actually taking in quite a lot!*

*So, even if with a light touch, I think we have good reason to make something of these two quite different occasions which look to the past as well as to the future. It would have been so much easier to have just one celebration day on 30<sup>th</sup> April but since it has worked out this way we should exploit that! I did warn that this would go on at some length – and so I continue!'*

### **'The Church 50 years on:**

*From my earliest days at Bow Common I have been inspired and guided by whatever I have read that you and/or Keith have written, about the way in which you approached the design and function of St. Paul's, Bow Common. I am but a Johnny-come-lately and a different kind of being to Gresham, but nevertheless it has framed everything I have tried to do with and within our building over the past nearly 15 years.*

*I am constantly showing people around the church – from Cabinet Minister Ruth Kelly when she had some communities-type ministry (in fact, she was Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) and made an early visit in relation to St. Paul's Way regeneration – to a couple of fascinated Muslim men who saw the doors open the other day – and many, many others in between. One of the most important formative processes for me of this building – and I always tell people about this – was the way in which (as you put it in 1962) the particular character of the building grew out of the actual life of that particular community at a particular time and in a particular place. You were sure that a building which 'lives now for and because of the local Christian community will continue to be "alive" for others who follow.' I can witness to the rightness of your view of nearly 50 years ago!*

*So much has changed both within the make-up of the Christian community here and within the local community in which we are set and which we are here to serve. Most of the people here now have come in my time for a variety of reasons, the majority of whom have never been to church before. This makes for a very different kind of church community to the one you found here in the '50's. The community in which we are is majority Muslim, with the Church no longer having the kind of place in society which I myself remember from the 50's and 60's when I was growing up in Hackney.*

*The exercise of deriving the form and function of the church out of the actual life of the Christian community here today would be an interesting one to re-run. However, even though so much has changed, within and without, this building continues to lend itself more and more to our life – both liturgical and communal.*

*I remember a comment of yours which I now cannot find in which (and which I hope I am not wrongly ascribing to you) you were saying that what you had resisted in designing this church was to create any kind of 'dual purpose' community facility cum church. From much further back in my memory is also a comment which I cannot ascribe to you with any certainty, but the gist of which was that the building and seating and configuration were to allow for the 'whole life of the people of God to be lived out in that one place'.'*

*'I can best illustrate this with some instances which follow:*

***Liturgical life:*** *I rejoice again and again in the amazing versatility of this liturgical space. An instance of how we exploit this can be found in Holy Week.*

*It has long struck me that after Palm Sunday and the fateful cleansing of the Temple, the whole of the sacred drama which follows in the Gospels is enacted entirely outside the Temple with all the pivotal moments taking place 'without a City wall'. This has led us over the years to moving our own liturgical drama in Holy Week 'without' our own Temple, as represented by the sacred space of the High Altar, ciborium and steps – ie. from the altar to the **church floor**.*

*Thus, Palm Sunday sees the blessing of Palms on the church courtyard outside, before the west doors, and then a procession out of doors on the streets around the church, and then the 'entry' through those doors into our own Jerusalem and Temple.*



Palm Sunday 2007



Palm Sunday 2009



Palm Sunday 2010



Palm Sunday 2006



Palm Sunday 2012

Thereafter, throughout Holy Week everything takes place on the floor of the church. We have a well-established *Seder* on the Monday in Holy Week – a real meal with some 60 people coming last year! The table at which the ‘head’ of the family presides (myself in this instance) is a decent wooden table from the church hall which is set well in front of the main altar on the floor of the church. Westwards of that is set a great square of tables and church benches. It is so easily done in that church! People love the *Seder* and it is now the one common meal that we share every year (harvest didn’t seem to work after a while). In fact, I may well accompany this very lengthy discourse with some photos, so that you can see what we do, but time may not allow on this occasion!’



The tables are set for the Seder 2007

The Seder in progress 2009



(One further eccentricity of mine – unknown to any but done deliberately! – was to very carefully position the wooden altar table across the divide in flooring surface, literally as a bridge. The brick surround to the altar is the sanctuary – the Holy Place – and the flagstone paving is the people’s space – symbolically the heavenly and the earthly spaces. The events of Holy Week and, indeed, Christ Himself, were laid down as a bridge between the Divine and the human realms and so in a small symbolic way this can be represented and actualized – there is an image of this earlier in the overall account. It just made it possible even in small ways to be intentional about what we were

doing but without being precious or making a big thing of it.)

*'On Maundy Thursday that same table then becomes the altar for the liturgy and the people's seating layout remains much the same as at the Seder, but with their dining tables removed. The Washing of Feet takes place in the midst of the people and then we all process, in a stripped and darkened church, to the Lady Chapel, now Gethsemane, for the Watch of the Passion.'*



Maundy Thursday 2011, the seating configuration with a bench set in the middle for those whose feet are to be washed by the priest.

Maundy Thursday Eucharist in progress 2010



*On Good Friday the table is removed and the Cross is set up and venerated exactly where the table had stood ...*



Good Friday seating configuration 2008



Good Friday seating configuration 2013 when the focus of devotion was Charles Lutyens' great figure of the 'Outraged Christ'

*... and at the Easter Vigil the Paschal Candle is lit at the same spot.'*



*'Throughout all of this the people have sat in the same configuration of seating as at the Seder and effectively we have created a sacred space for that whole cycle of liturgical drama 'outside' the Temple, revisiting and re-defining the same space day by day. Then when Day Easter has come we return to the High Altar and, as per your original intention, gather around the altar for the Eucharistic Prayer. This had fallen out of practice for many years but I revived this on major Festivals shortly after I came here and people do like it. This is one way, then, in which we rejoice in the liturgical flexibility which you have given us in this building. It is the building itself which often suggests how we might do things now, with meaning and with dignity.*

**Our 'whole life':**

*As I have mentioned, both those inside and outside the church are either different or in a different place to the East Enders of fifty years ago. The churches now operate around here in a far less independent way than they did, for instance, when I was in my teens. We sit in what is still a tough and not at all prosperous part of East London and within sight of the tall buildings of the prosperous City of London in one direction and with the glistening towers of Canary Wharf within walking distance in another direction. Just last night there was a shoot-out 5 minutes' walk away and crashed escape vehicles dumped in the parish and a huge amount of police activity.*

*Drugs are a major problem, gangs are another feature of life (they go with the drugs) and the general feeling of life being an uphill slog. The intention of the regeneration of St. Paul's Way is to lift the bar on all of this and to engage with these features of life and try not to create the kind of problems which past planners built in to their own un-joined-up attempts at configuring this community. The jury is out on whether or how this intention will succeed. But there are some good people involved as well as a mixture of the usual suspects!*

*Shamiana was a turning point, not only for the way the church congregation – and in particular those here from Gresham's time – began to move on, but also for all of us to begin to discover how this building can come into its own as a place where the rest of the life of this church can be lived out. Thus we discover it every year to be a fantastic space for our own community events! I hope I will have time to attach some pictures! Our Christmas Bazaars are held here every year as well as events just as the Agencies Forum and regular school events.'*





**St. Paul with St. Luke School**



*'At the Shamiana event some women met who had been working in textile projects locally for a number of years and out of their contact came a huge borough-wide people's textile art project now called 'Stitches in Time'. It began as the Tower Hamlets Millennium Tapestry which in 2000 produced a series of 50 very large textile panels telling the story of Tower Hamlets over the past 2000 years.'*

### Stitches in Time 2000 - 2011



*These were assembled from hundreds and hundreds of individual contributions made in schools, nurseries, elders' groups, community centres, churches and so on by people of every possible background – very much in the spirit of the Shamiana panels which had been made by over 800 women and girls from all over the world. We became the home of the Millennium Tapestry Project which was launched from here in 2000 and then became a charity (Stitches in Time) and has continued every year to show new panels or themed work (thus a series of works around the River and docks will be displayed with workshops in June of this year).'*

*In 2004 the upper west face of the church became the place for a huge shimmer-disk installation by Rose Finn-Kelcey – 850 square feet with 85,000 shimmer disks which looked absolutely stunning in the wind and sun (still viewable on [www.smsangel.org](http://www.smsangel.org)) with the simple device of an 'Angel' in text message format – terribly conventional (an angel on a church!) and yet staggeringly impressive. We won a 1<sup>st</sup> place award for that and people still identify the church through that installation.'*

**Angel by Rose Finn-Kelcey : 2004**



*'We were also a stopping point on a Millennium art trail with a single work by Nigerian artist Sokari Douglas Camp – whose controversial work based on the death of Stephen Lawrence was shown here.*



Well-known Nigerian artist, Sokari Douglas-Camp displayed this work in 2000 when the church was selected to be one of a series of places of worship on a Millennium Art Trail, each displaying just one work.

The Bishop of Stepney of the time, Rt. Revd. John Sentamu (now Archbishop of York) had just conducted a Confirmation service in the church when he stood next to this work. The theme of the work is the horrific racially-motivated murder of the 19 year old Stephen Lawrence in Eltham in 1993. The national Union Flag is made up of a combination of crosses and in this work the artist shows a crucified figure, crucified on the very crosses which make up our national flag – a very hard-edged message.

Bishop Sentamu had, in fact, been a member of the Stephen Lawrence Commission which examined his death and so his presence here is particularly resonant with this particular work of art.

*Later in the year we will be having a one day event by two artists whose primary interest is in brutalism and estates such as Robin Hood Gardens and buildings such as ours. Julika Gitner and Jon Purnell, however, are as equally concerned with how people live as with their art. Jon is a psychiatric nurse and so they have put on an event in a mental health group's space, by people he works with, around their personal experience of 'Care in the Community' – they called the event 'Scare in the Community'! Just at this moment they are visiting the parish a lot to find out about the built environment here and asking people who live in the huge hotchpotch of housing that we have, what their experience is of living here – through video. They are assembling the video and other works by another dozen or more artists – very much rooted and hands on – for a one day event here at the end of June.*

### **Stones of Menace – an exhibition exploring brutalist architecture: 2010**





*We have also had the church used by community groups for various events. We are friends with the Toyhouse Library Association very nearby and so they held a sizeable 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration conference in the church last year which had some inspiring contributions about child development and the place of Play in child development with the whole assembly getting into 'play'.*

### **Toyhouse Library Child Development Conference: 2009**





*A community based group (Social Action for Health, SAFH) which does a lot of work on the ground with users of health and mental health services branched out to engage faith groups (churches in the first instance) with issues of mental health in the community. We were the first church with which they worked and just a few months ago they brought the whole project together in the church with a full day conference. The upshot was that someone in government was there and was shocked to discover that their funding was about to run out and is working hard to reverse that. Mental health and wellbeing is one of the serious issues of our area.*

**SAFH Day Conference on Mental Wellbeing in the Community: 2010**



I discovered a little while ago that a very remarkable and delightful member of my congregation had been engaged over the past couple of years in bridging the gap between homeless people and the rest of us. As a student, Lidija was troubled by this gap and so thought of the simple medium of 'socks' as a useful currency with which to start conversations with people on the streets! She has created a voluntary network which goes out every week with socks and offers them to people they come across on the streets and have built very real relationships with many homeless people.

When I discovered that she now had over 300 volunteers I thought that we ought to do something about this! We then had the St. Paul's, Bow Common 'Sox Appeal' (cheesy, I know!) in the run-up to Christmas where our folk brought in probably hundreds of pairs of socks. She has also created a social enterprise, with people who live on the streets leading guided tours of very interesting parts of London, but also from their experience of point of view of those same streets. These are the award-winning '**SockMob Unseen Tours**' <http://sockmobevents.org.uk/> And then just two days before Christmas Lidija invited a mix of volunteers and homeless friends to an event and party in the church! I had no idea that the cleared floor of the church was such a great party venue! This is part of the whole life of our church nowadays and the church, with benches moved, proved to be a wonderful (if cold!) place in which to celebrate this work. This image shows the last remnants of the party-goers before they dispersed. 'Doug the Dog' was the most popular party animal!



'Dilwara Begum is one of the Bengali girls who danced at the opening event of Shamiana in the church in 1998. Ten years later she came to be married and one of the pre-nuptial ceremonies is the Mendhi ceremony which is basically a non-religious social gathering, a major bonding exercise by the women (or men) of the extended families and all focused on the beautiful henna patterns painted on the bride-to-be's hands. She very much wanted this to be in the church and our brave PCC had no problem with that as it was for community and not religious use! Our Muslim neighbours are very much part of life here now. I fear you would be appalled, but your wonderful altar canopy looked beautiful, decked out as the traditional bridal canopy for Dilwara to sit in front of it and celebrate, in a totally secular celebration, her forthcoming nuptials. We have now had four Mendhi ceremonies but the other three have been in the church hall.'



*'Perhaps the most unusual use of the church serving the wide life of our community took place last July. The RC church at the other end of St. Paul's Way is now a Vietnamese Chaplaincy and every year they hold a mission to which about 30 guests come from abroad to celebrate with them. Their speaker last year attracted 150 visitors from all over Europe and they were in a serious fix. Fr. Paul asked for help and so I took him into the church and showed him the space – which he had never seen before.*

*When he recovered from the shock of seeing such an amazing liturgical space he then got it – that, for instance, by setting your benches edge to edge there were the most wonderful bed troughs formed! There was also a great deal of floor space in which to cluster together or to spread out for more personal space. And so for a week 71 Vietnamese pilgrims found the church to be a wonderful place in which to sleep and live! Many had been boat people and so there was another layer in all of this, but they reconfigured the church to become a camping area and all slept well. When Sunday came they completely restored the church for us to use and then turned it back into a camping village for the rest of their stay!*



*It would be easy to see all this as treating the church as the kind of 'dual purpose' space which you had not intended but in each of these cases the use of the building emerged out of the **needs** of our folk or of the people of our local community. These are all parts of the whole life of the parish and in all these events – as well as our own regular Fayres or Bazaars, the High Altar is the natural and undemonstrative centre of all this activity and 'presides' unashamedly and undisguised, as surely Christ must also preside and bless these many ways in which His many children gather and celebrate their lives and interests. Nothing unholy about any of that! Even so, I hope that these tales have not horrified you too much!'*

*'Enough! I have promised myself NOT to run beyond 10 pages of A4 and have rambled on far too long but this finally puts on paper what I've been wanting to share with you for some time. I so enormously respect what you have given us here ('you' to include Keith and Gresham too, God rest their souls) that I have long wanted to 'catch you up' with what this building has made possible for us in my time here over these past 12 years or so.*

*As part of our ongoing investigation of how we can be fully part of the redevelopment of the heart of the parish right alongside us, my three part-time development workers are looking to see how our hall space can be of more use to the community. We have hosted – or still do – a variety of uses, from Pentecostal churches (also in the main church), to a playgroup, alternative therapy groups, mental health service users, several self-help groups, the odd tenants' groups, children's parties and so on. This sounds like a lot going on but actually for most of the week the hall lies empty. To be honest we only survive financially because of the top-up from our user groups. Last year we had the 2<sup>nd</sup> smallest unrestricted income of any of the churches in Tower Hamlets and it is a constant challenge to pay our way – though we always manage to do so. Time and again, however, the available space proves to be too small and too limited in its facilities for potential users or hirers. With so many homes being built and a growing need for community space we have to wonder whether or how we can address this.*

*Having visited St. Bede's, Basingstoke (this was the last church which Bob Maguire worked on and is based solidly on his initial design, before his retirement) I came back inspired! Having also seen the outline of your 'first design' here, about which you wrote that fascinating letter a year ago, I then began to wonder how a 'cloister' would work here in the form of a fourth side to the existing three sides of vicarage, church and church hall.'*

*'The enclosed garden space (now the vicarage garden, the hope being that a new vicarage garden could be negotiated on adjacent land on the north side of the vicarage belonging to the local authority) would be the only tranquil, totally safe and not overlooked space anywhere near here. I have had children's groups and mental health groups already say how they would love such a space. It would be impossible to do anything about any of this without serious partnership (that word again!) funding from some of these groups. But it is something we might feel is worth looking at if our audits and investigations suggest this might provide what is needed or missing on this street. Again, I risk horrifying you with such a prospect, and it may never happen! We are nowhere near looking at this as yet and I shall never see it if it does come to pass, but St. Bede's really did inspire me (so really the idea came from you!) and it may well be worth a bit of a look.*

*I really will end now! Just to say that I have passed on your details of paint colour and suggestions about paint removal and repainting of the porch lettering, to John Allan of Avanti (our very good and sympathetic architects of which John is a specialist in modern architecture and sensitive to the building and to us as clients). As you know, the issue of re-painting the porch lettering has been running since 1998 when Keith agreed a colour with you but never did pass it on to me until he had worked out with manufacturers precisely how it would be made and how the old paint would be removed and so on! And then when he died it all came to an end.*

*John is trying to see if we could possibly have this done for the anniversary – especially with your kind offer of paying for the paint! No doubt the DAC will need to get involved and once we get into all of that I can't see it being done until the summer – but I have longed and waited for that to be done for 12 years now & hopefully it may happen this year. (In fact it was done in time for the Anniversary.)*

*I now feel free to engage with all of this again. For a couple of years I have lived with the growing threat of having to take on the church, parish and tiny congregation of All Hallows in Devons Rd., next door, as well as my own present parish without any extra help. The prospect horrified me as I would end up serving two parishes badly because of sheer overburden and an impossible task. I therefore pressed the 'pause' button on much that we wanted to do here. To be honest, it would have finished me off.'*

*'Mercifully this option receded just a couple of months ago and I can now end my working ministry at Bow Common and I have felt free to start things moving again here. Even though I am getting a lot more tired and long-term health issues assert themselves and I go from here to retirement I can at least lay some foundations and do some ground work for whatever a successor will do and bring to this church with his/her own gifts and skills, but hopefully also within great respect for what you have given us in the extraordinary building which we have.*

*I really do hope that you will be free to come to the celebrations in April and, if you are willing, to say a brief something at the Thursday Mass. If you are still in London and can come to the Dedication Day Mass, too, that would be wonderful.*

*Sorry that it has taken so long to put this together but being single-handed here means often having to put things into a long queue!*

*With my very best wishes,*

*Duncan'*

**Bob Maguire's reply:**

*'23<sup>rd</sup> March 2010*

*Dear Duncan,*

*I printed out your 10-page letter & took it with me to read while we were away - which I've done several times, because I'm so delighted with it. Thank you so much for putting all that in writing for me.*

*Alison and I will be with you on 29 April, and if there is anything you would wish me to do or say I'd be very happy to do so. I'm afraid we will have to be travelling back to Scotland late afternoon that day to manage an unalterable engagement at this end on the 30th. I'm sorry this has rather coincided. If you could let me know your programme for the 29th, then I shall be able to book the rail tickets.*

*Your letter has provoked thoughts about the changes that have come about, in the Church in all its diversity and in society, since SPBC was conceived and built. Looking back, I realise that 'the issues' seemed so straightforward and clear to me as a young revolutionary Christian, and that was set out, I think quite clearly, when Keith and I wrote *Modern Churches of the World*. After that it slowly, rather imperceptibly, changed and this was reflected not only in the nature of church designs over the years but of course in my personal development which had its crises (the first becoming unchurched yet not faithless for several years). Also in things I was writing - I found I had to develop some kind of theory or at least a framework about designing, and this involved starting with what I called the 'the total situation' facing the designer, uniquely on every single project. (Part of the 'total situation', I realised, was the designer's own prejudices and wrong assumptions which were unlikely to be corrected in the process, so it had to be seen that the outcome would be, not a compromise, but a product of human frailty as much as, hopefully, inspired creativity.)*

*So when you describe some of the wonderful things that have happened in St. Paul's, and think perhaps I might be 'horrified', my thoughts are these. I designed the building as 'liturgical space', informed by how I saw the nature of liturgy as the formative activity in realising the community as the Body of Christ. Later (and now) I would call it 'inclusive space' - space that enables everyone within it, wherever they are, to feel included in what is happening, wherever in the space that may be. So this quality naturally extends inclusiveness to anything the community wishes to do in the building, and the building should lend itself creatively to community-building of any kind. Far from being horrified, I am utterly thrilled.'*

*'About the 'dual purpose' thing, the buildings that were going up all over the country at that time, as the preferred policy of the C of E, were the opposite of inclusive space. They were double-ended church halls, longish shoe-boxes with a stage at one end and a so-called sanctuary at the other (another stage for the performance of religious rites) which could be screened off for secular activities - the polarity between 'sacred' and 'secular' being thus made extra manifest!*

*Although I had to put seats on the plan for the War Damage Commission and the DAC, you may have noticed that the plan I drew for publication purposes always leaves the seats off, and this has been so for all the subsequent churches. The reason is, of course, that seating, or no seating, is a flexible thing to be decided rather ad hoc by the parish: hence my delight at seeing what is happening in the photos you've sent me. Another thing that was important was a certain quality of bareness, which I had been impressed by in some continental Romanesque churches, and which seemed appropriate when a congregation is to make the building its own, and find for itself what it needs for what it is to do.*

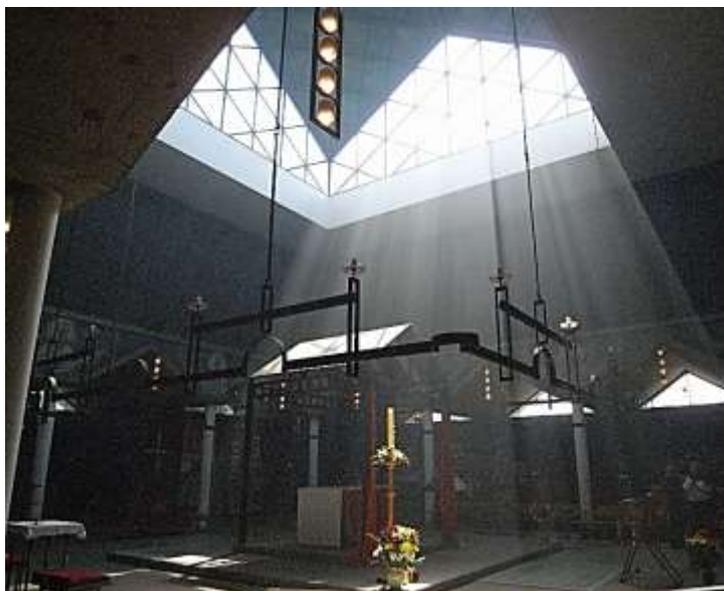
*You mention the idea of a kind of cloister made in the vicarage garden. This seems to me to be a very good way of getting extra space for all the things you want to do, and so naturally my mind's eye has been working on it. What I would like to do is to offer some very informal services (free) towards achieving it at some time in the future. This could go on by means of emails and surface mails at a gentle but not too slow speed.'*

*'It would have to start with you setting out what the problems are. And sending me some images of the garden space (I have of course got the dimensions accurately enough) in its present form and condition. Photos from each corner towards diagonally opposite would be sufficient. I would not wish to tread on any toes, so I'd like to make it plain that once past the ideas development stage, I'd bow out and let John Allan do what he wishes with it. I may be useful, too, in getting a design through all the Powers That Be.*

*Which brings me to Elaine, and your mention of the possibility of 'doing something' later during the year, maybe with her. So long as I know well in advance, I'd love to do this. My problem is, as you can guess from the restriction on the 29th and 30th, that living so far from our families, Alison and I have diaries booked far ahead to suit six children and nine grandchildren between us! - and friends from far south booked in to stay over on their journeys to the further north.*

*Once again, thank you for the wonderful letter.*

*With kind regards,  
Bob'*



In the event, Bob and Alison Maguire were unable to be at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations but he sent this message, which was read out on 29<sup>th</sup> April at the service on that day.

**'Some thoughts on the occasion of  
the Jubilee of St Paul's church, Bow Common  
(Sent for the Celebrations of 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010)**

Robert Maguire

*First I want to say that I'm very sad not to be with you today. I now live in a remote valley in Scotland, and – rather suddenly – one of my daughters has decided to seek me out.*

*Naturally, for some time I have been thinking about those days 50 years ago and the events that brought about the building of the church. The general atmosphere in the country at the time was one of reconstruction and hope, but even by those standards the events surrounding the new St Paul's were not only more forward-looking but revolutionary and daring. With hindsight, we could even say prophetic.*

*Both church buildings, St Paul's and St Luke's, had been totally destroyed in the war, and Father Gresham Kirkby was using the old parish hall to experiment with what would then have been considered quite revolutionary ways of Eucharistic worship. Unfettered by any constrictions from higher authority, he could move furniture around or throw it out, and generally exercise a freedom in what he and his adventurous parishioners wanted to do, simply because it was a hall and not a proper church.*

*When the War Damage Commission allocated the money to rebuild St Paul's, Gresham had a vision of the kind of building it should be, by then based on these experiences with his parishioners, the local church itself. I think it is very important to remember that the inspiration for this building was completely 'home-grown'.*

*Gresham however needed to find an architect, and I'm afraid that the church architects of the day would not have understood what he was talking about. But through my friend Keith Murray, a designer who had done some work 'down the road' at St Katharine's Foundation, and who later became my partner, he was introduced to me. I was a callow youth of 25, had never built a thing, and was most unlikely to be taken at all seriously by the Diocesan authorities. But since I was full of similar revolutionary ideas, Gresham by some truly amazing fast talk succeeded in getting me appointed.*

*Looking back at what we all thought we were doing (and when I say 'we all' I mean Gresham and his PCC backed solidly by his congregation, and me, and Keith who was to do the mosaics) it is quite clear that it was a very focussed vision indeed.'*

*'We were designing a church for a new vision of Eucharistic worship. New, but in fact ancient and original, the inclusive and also the defining act of unity of the whole People of God, the Christian Church. It is difficult now to remember how, in those days of the 50s, the Holy Communion service was attended by congregations who spent much of their time in private prayer with their heads bowed or even in their hands. By contrast, we were trying to build a church which would encourage true relationships in the liturgy – priest to people, people to one another, priest to God and people to God, the worship of the whole Church together. Encourage, but not cause; because it is only people coming together with understanding and faith which bring those relationships to life.*

*We now (by and large) take all that for granted, and so it could be said – many people do say – that Gresham, and his local church people, and St Paul's, took a major role in the renewal of our worship.*

*So that was the focussed objective we were making for. It was a great – I mean big and important – objective. Looking at it now in the context of what has come about in recent years in this church, I see that its very focus prevented us from seeing the further possibilities of the thing that was built.*

*My own first introduction to these things was my visit to the exhibition Shamiana and also to meet Father Duncan Ross, of whom I had heard much but never met. The great west doors were wide open & people of all sorts, many or perhaps most of whom had never been inside a church before, were going freely in and out.'*

*' Many, too, had no knowledge of Christianity; but the substance of the exhibition, the wide openness, the freedom of space and movement in the building, all combined to convey a strong message of welcome, reconciliation and community bridge-building. And meeting Duncan confirmed that new and exciting things were to go on happening in the East End, centred around St Paul's. And started a friendship which is not lessened by having to be conducted mainly by email because of the great physical distance between us.*

*You are doing wonderful things in this building, things so important for the surrounding community and far beyond. They are things that I, certainly, could never have dreamt of when I designed it, being centred on flexibility for worship. It turns out, to my great joy, to be flexibility for many other things that build trust and grow true communities. But those are really worship, too.'*

The final words that we have from Bob Maguire about the church were written in March 2013 following our correspondence:

### **'St Paul's as resurrection – Robert McGuire 2013**

*When I started as a student at the Architectural Association School in 1948, Bedford Square was intact, with its central garden, surprisingly, still surrounded by fine iron railings (the Duke of Bedford had not allowed them to be demolished for munitions), and green and quiet under its vast plane trees. From the School you could walk east, past the British Museum, also untouched by bombing – although if you looked to the right as you passed, the streets running south ended filled with unexpected daylight where buildings were missing. Then on to the end of Great Russell Street, turn right and immediately left, and you could feel that you had left the West End behind as a separate city. The next half mile, for the length of Theobalds Road and on into Clerkenwell, was a wide flat plain of broken brick, colonised by swathes of purple rosebay willow-herb.*

*As students we watched this great open space being filled over the next five years with poorly designed office buildings in the vaguely neoclassical redbrick style of the late 1930s. Quick planning decisions were taken to get the economy and the government apparatus going again.*

*Out east, on the other side of the City, things – on the ground – moved more slowly. Vast areas of the East End were similarly flat plains of broken brick, and where not, consisted of gap-toothed streets with houses shored up with timber. The lack of immediate visible progress hid some measured activity behind the scenes, because it was decided that the war damage afforded a chance to redevelop east London with better housing, planned industry and much open space.'*

*'The distinguished Town Planner, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, had been appointed to prepare the County of London Plan (more usually known as the Abercrombie Plan) which envisaged green 'corridors' wending their way from the centre through the urban landscape to meet up eventually with the Green Belt outside the city. Between these parkland corridors, new housing would be planned on modern principles, a mixture of houses and low and high flat-blocks with much open space. It was a Utopian strategy, and involved consideration in minute detail of every local area to decide exactly what, of what had been left after bombing, to leave intact and what to demolish and start again.*

*It was also a strategy which could involve the force of governmental authority to dictate the fortunes of local people in unacceptable ways, for the re-arrangement or often abolition of streets necessitated the moving of cohesive communities while building to rehouse them. At that date, it seems, the extent to which the street community was the essential support group for the family and the individual was unappreciated, and moving it most often meant uprooting and destroying. Gradually, it became obvious that the strategy was not working, but causing serious breakdown of the cohesive structure of working-class society which had sustained it so beautifully during the years of blitz.'*

*'In 1954, when I was asked by Father Gresham Kirkby to design the new St Paul's, and my friend and close co-worker Keith Murray commissioned to design and execute the mosaics, the community of the parish of St Paul with St Luke still reflected that traditional structure. Gresham's parishioners were a sizable, tight-knit group of people totally committed to the Church in that place and to their leader, Gresham. They had completely lost both their churches in the bombing, but they still had their church hall and the parish school, both of them worn-out Victorian buildings which they took in hand and used creatively for radical experiments in liturgy and education respectively. (They would have been utterly amazed had they known at that time that it would be their very experiments which later would lead to revolutions and reforms in both fields directly through the inspiration they imparted to the design of the two buildings they commissioned.)*

*Gresham and his people had a free hand in arranging and re-arranging the furniture for the services in the hall. You are not allowed to do this in a parish church, except in minor detail, without being granted a Faculty from the Vice Chancellor, via the Diocesan Advisory Committee. A hazardous business. None of that applies to a church hall. Gresham had come from a 'school' of radical theological thinking within the Catholic tradition in the Anglican Church, and was putting into effect his social convictions and his insights into the nature of liturgical worship; both endeared him to a faithful and enthusiastic congregation. At 25, I was a dissenting, reformist Roman Catholic campaigning for Mass 'facing the people' and in the vernacular tongue like the avant-garde in France and Germany, and for radical rethinking of church design to match; it was possibly the mutual recognition of revolutionary tendencies that sealed my appointment even though I had not built a thing except for a small charity kiosk on Victoria Station. Keith, who had met Gresham some time earlier at St Katherine's Foundation and introduced me to him, was working as a designer of vestments and silverware in a modern vein within the Arts and Craft tradition inherited from such revolutionary figures as William Morris and Eric Gill. He too saw a reformed liturgy as needing a re-thinking of the design of churches and of all the things in them.*

*But in the 'main-line' Churches in Britain, habits of worship died hard. It is difficult now, after so many reforms (good and occasionally bad) have taken place, to recall what typical High Anglican and Roman Catholic worship was like for the lay person at that time, or for that matter Evangelical Anglican worship.*

*The altar (or for some, the holy table) was always attached to the east wall of the church – it had been since medieval times except for a brief period when the puritans put it, as decidedly a table, lengthwise in the middle of the chancel. So for the Eucharist the priest faced eastwards with his back to the people; and as he was usually quite a long way away from even the front row of pews, what he was saying was mostly lost, and what he was doing was hidden from view. All this was justified quite explicitly by the Tractarians and the Cambridge Camden Society as being the appropriate 'processional' form of worship, the humble congregation being led in proper hierarchy (which included, architecturally, a series of upward steps and a holy portal, the rood screen) in a pilgrimage towards the east, symbolic of the risen Christ.'*

*'There was no concept of dialogue, of liturgical participation. The congregation were effectively reduced to private prayer occasionally performed in unison (as in the Creed). The usual physical stance of a member of the congregation was sitting or kneeling bowed forward with forehead resting on joined hands, often as low as the top of the pew in front. The memory of this comes back to me vividly as I write, and indeed when I moved to Oxfordshire in the late 1970s, much of the congregation of our small Anglican parish church felt that this was the decent thing, even at the communion rail.*

*This may serve, I think, to put the radical nature of what Gresham and his people were doing into a proper perspective. For me it was a wonderful breath of fresh air – to meet not just a priest, but his whole congregation, inspired by the Holy Spirit to worship together as explicitly, demonstrably, the People of God.*

*The only place where I had had this experience earlier was in a small group of Roman Catholic students at the AA School who were friends of Fr Michael Hollings, then parish priest of St Patrick's, Soho ("the prostitutes' church"). He acted informally as chaplain to us and celebrated the Eucharist with us around a café table at the School. He was certainly a formative person for me.'*

*'The saintly priest later became Catholic Chaplain to the University of Oxford, where he slept on the floor of his office and had down-and-outs living at the chaplaincy, sharing meals with the students and the invited wives of Oxford dons. The bookies had him on better odds than Basil Hume for Archbishop of Westminster, but it was (perhaps predictably) not to be.*

*The story of 'the first design' of St Paul's and the little miracle by which it was able to be superseded has been told elsewhere. On looking recently at the plans of both schemes, I recalled that when I was able to do the final design (which never went before the old-guard DAC) I drew it up without any seating shown. I now remember that this was because Gresham and his people wanted to continue to move the seats around as he was doing in the parish hall, and if I had shown an 'official' seating layout he would never have been able to do it – nor Duncan and his people since.*

*Soon after the completion of the church, the Abercrombie Plan was virtually abandoned, the pressure to build homes caused politicians to go for more expeditious, piecemeal planning decisions. The wide urban park on the other side of Burdett Road was slimmed down to its present size, and suddenly a previously unplanned tower block appeared alongside the church, after the clearance of most of the local street housing.*

*People were rehoused far away from their home patch – many as far away as Basildon New Town – & the indigenous, internally supportive community was dispersed. Many people lost their sense of identity; a whole society was broken. Gresham lost his parish people. He, with a few others, had virtually to start again from scratch.*

*When I sit back and take a long view of the vicissitudes of St Paul's, and of the ways in which God's hand has been upon it, its people and its two unusually anointed vicars, of the extraordinary Christian work that has been, and is being quietly done there, I find again the only word to express my refreshed astonishment: alleluia.*

*Yes. Alleluia !*

**Robert Maguire, March 2013**

The images above and my trying to unpack for Bob Maguire how the church that he and Keith and Gresham had planned was now in such a different social context, give a glimpse of how their remarkable building has surprised us all in what it lends itself to so admirably. Interestingly, so many of these uses were possible without re-arranging the 'furniture' in any way. It felt very much that the church remained as 'church' whilst welcoming and embracing the community in to share its space in ways which did not prevent it still from being 'church'.

The final major event and presence that we welcomed into St. Paul's, Bow Common was a major work by Charles Lutyens – his 'Outraged Christ.' This was installed in the church as part of his retrospective exhibition, 'Being in the World' in 2012. After the exhibition had ended, we were delighted to continue to have it on display in the body of the church until 2014. For much of the year it stood amongst the body of the congregation, but in Holy Week 2013 and 2014 the flexibility of the church allowed us to reconfigure the church to make it the focus of our devotions and observance of the Passion of Christ – surely the most fitting use of such an object. I was interested to see a point early on when candles appeared alongside the figure. It had gone from being an art exhibit to an object of devotion and it certainly had that ability to fulfil both those roles so well, also surrounded by the mosaic Heavenly Host which Lutyens had completed in 1968 but (as seen in an earlier section) had finally signed only in 2012 before the exhibition opened. BBC Oxford News produced this segment just before it came to the church: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-oxfordshire-13892995>

What follows is Charles Lutyens own description of the Outraged Christ followed by an account by Jason Paul Haskins, from Texas. Jason has a considerable architectural knowledge and came all the way from Texas primarily to see the church! We made a good relationship and he developed a significant admiration for the building. Haskins has an excellent blog and website 'Locus Iste' <http://locusiste.org/>.

His account of the Outraged Christ appeared on his blog in February 2012

<http://locusiste.org/blog/2012/02/outraged-christ/>.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012, on the way to a conference in the Netherlands, he made a stopover on a Sunday morning and it was delightful to see him back in the church this time to share in the liturgy and not just to admire the building – a unique return visit amongst the many architects who have visited! His Blog on his November visit is at:

<http://locusiste.org/blog/2012/11/outraged-christ-and-st-paul-bow-common-revisited/>

### **'Outraged Christ and St Paul, Bow Common (Re)visited**

22 November 2012

*Revisiting St Paul, Bow Common and Lutyen's Outraged Christ after visiting both in person in London, this post contains personal reflections on both and how they work exceedingly well in service of the liturgy. Earlier this year I wrote about the massive found-wood crucifix by Charles Lutyens entitled Outraged Christ currently installed at St Paul, Bow Common in London. The conclusion was that this was an encouraging direction for liturgical arts, an appropriate and timely expression of the content, and an exemplar of art and architecture working in concert in the service of liturgy.*

*Fortuitous scheduling for travel to the Netherlands gave me 18 in hours in London on a Sunday morning. This meant allowed me to both participate in worship at St Paul, Bow Common (which I was not possible during my previous research trip) and to see the Outraged Christ sculpture in person.*

### **Worship at St Paul, Bow Common**

*First, some thoughts on St Paul, Bow Common in use. On a personal note, having spent so much time studying, thinking and writing about this building (it was the subject of my (unofficial) Master thesis), immediately upon ducking under the corner of the portico to escape the rain, I thought to say, "hello, old friend." As a general rule, I do not talk to or anthropomorphize buildings, but in this case it is very hard not to. She has so much personality and vitality.*

*The vicar, Prebendary Duncan Ross, greeted me with a vigorous hug (he greeted everyone that way this morning) and the salutation, "welcome back to your church." And I thought at the time that it was odd to actually feel more welcome at a church I have only visited once before (and of a different denomination) than my own. And that is not just a reflection of academic and architectural familiarity.*

### **St Paul, Bow Common**

(For Haskins' images see: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/pallrokk/8197429393/>)

*Once again, my readings of the church based on the documentation proved themselves valid in experience. And then some. Specifically, the formal superimposition of spaces which facilitate the simultaneous expression of domus Dei and domus ecclesiae (which are generally have contradictory material expressions) was further enhanced in the celebration of the liturgy. And the influence runs both ways: the material implications of the objects and space shape the postures, arrangement, and signification of the assembled Body of Christ and the particular local worship enlivens, completes, and gives more complex meaning to the building and its parts.'*

*'Speaking to a few parishioners afterwards about that particular local worship and its informal formality. They settled on the description "chaotic high church." This is wonderfully accurate and in many ways the best of all possible worlds. The celebration is full high church "bells and smells": generous incense, worthy vestments, intoned prayers, combined with hymns from the richness of English hymnody.*

*At the same time, there was a casual coming and going, reminiscent of a family gathering more than anything else. But the centrality of the altar, together with its concentric spatial attending features (outer wall, peristyle atrium, lantern, paving changes, corona, steps, aedicula/ciborium), meant that the liturgy was always the principal aim and focus.*

*The balance thus achieved makes it difficult to fall into either the trap of self-important, hypocritically pious, fetishized religiosity on the one hand or the trap of self-satisfying, watered-down, humanist spirituality on the other.*

*The important ideas of "active participation" and a greater openness towards the liturgy have far too often found expression in adaptations of the liturgical celebration. But rather than bringing the liturgy down to the level of the people, as it were, our goal should be to bring people up to the level of the liturgy. (Case in point, although not the only method for its fulfillment, the phrase *actuosa participatio* originates in the interest greater availability, accessibility, and wide-spread use of Gregorian chant.) This is significantly harder, as it requires that we not re-form the liturgy itself but rather re-form ourselves.*

*At St Paul, Bow Common the community realizes this worthy goal through the balanced combination of a non-linear hierarchy of spaces distinct but not separate (architecture), a commitment to the continuity and tradition of worship not as an end in itself (liturgy), and above all in the context of an honestly joyous and welcoming attitude from the clergy and the assembly (community). And you could go on and list the further good work of the church outside the communal celebration as well.*

*In short, the celebration achieves in parallel the same confluence of *domus Dei* and *domus ecclesiae* achieved by the architecture. The result is an elusive and remarkable balance to which we (regardless of style worship) would do well to aspire.*

### **Outraged Christ, (Re)visited**

*Seeing Lutyen's crucifix in person likewise confirmed my initial impressions of the work, but the added concrete experience greatly increased my appreciation.*

### **Outraged Christ | St Paul, Bow Common**

*(For Haskins' images see:*

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/pallrokk/8198554748/>)

*I did not anticipate its impressive weight and muscular presence. The scale of the work and the attitude of its posture, especially the unusual extended knee which hangs just over the viewer's head, makes it overwhelming and awesome. The propriety of the scale and proportion of the crucifix to those of the building further accentuates this impression.'*

*'The vertical component mirrors and then develops the columns, while the horizontal echoes the horizontal wood of the benches. The horizontal also occurs within the realm of the triangular spandrels and angel mosaics (also by Charles Lutyens, 50 years earlier) so that Christ's head is at the level of the angels' heads.*

*There were many details revealed in the closer inspection. In particular, concavity of the chest seems to speak to the pain and depravity of the Passion. So too the withered right arm, which was uncovered from the remnant of another sculpture destroyed by the artist.'*



*'The contrast between the two arms reminds of the dual expressions of the well-known Pantokrator ikon. Such a formal dichotomy is a great technique for increasing the signifying content of liturgical art and for expressing the important reality of paradoxes inherent in our attempts to communicate divine revelation.*

*The pained contortion of the left foot comes from the source material where the tree grew around a piece of steel. This element highlights the found-wood nature of the piece as a whole, a significant aspect of the rough and weak aesthetic that I feel reflects a critical expression of contemporary culture. At the time of my visit, the crucifix was placed amongst the congregation's benches, in the corner left by the radial arrangement of the benches set in the rectangular atrium/nave. It would be possible, if difficult, to install this work as the principal crucifix in a church associated with the altar (often reductively compacted to the back wall). But it would be an impressive result. Here it is a temporary addition which, as mentioned before, is extremely resonant. And the placement in the nave highlights the multiplicity of symbols of the Body of Christ present in the celebration of the liturgy.*

*It is truly a serious and exemplary work of religious and, moreover, liturgical art for our time.'*

