

NEWSLETTER

NO.29 - SPRING 2023
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Methodist **Modern**
Art Collection

FRIENDS OF THE METHODIST MODERN ART COLLECTION



Exhibitions open in Bristol
MMAC @ 3Gen
Frank Roper at Woodhouse Grove School
John N Gibbs in Conversation
Meeting the Dalit Madonna

EDITORIAL

The Methodist Modern Art Collection is doing what it does best – touring the country and touching lives.

It was wonderful to attend the opening of **Articles of Faith - Where Our Paths Meet** at Victoria Methodist Church and to visit John Wesley's New Room, where four other works are on display (see page 6). Both exhibitions run until 8 April and I heartily commend them to you.

It was equally wonderful to read (on page 7) Rev. Bob Drost, Chaplain at Woodhouse Grove School, reflect on how the ongoing loan is impacting lives there; and (on page 10) how the children and young people at 3Generate reacted to the artworks they saw last Autumn.

Continuing to give thanks for how we have been blessed in the last 60 years, we feature (on page 12) the second half of Ann Sumner's conversation with John N Gibbs and share (on page 14) Sarah Middleton's account of how the Dalit Madonna joined the Collection.

We hope you enjoy this Newsletter produced, once again, with the generous help of CultureShock Media.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

Art Collection Management Committee Members

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

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Front Cover: Works from the Collection on display with artefacts from other faith traditions at Victoria Methodist Church Bristol.



Three Kings by David Jones, engraved woodblock (image reversed) ©TMCP

LOAN TO MAJOR NEW DAVID JONES EXHIBITION

The Management Committee are delighted to be lending the Collection's *Three Kings* woodblock by David Jones to the exhibition '*Hill-rhythms David Jones + Capel-y-ffin*' at Brecknock Museum & Art Gallery, y Gaer, Brecon. Jones (1895-1974) described his time in the Black Mountains in the 1920s as 'a new beginning' after his devastating experiences in World War 1. The woodblock perfectly fits this theme, seeming to show the magi journeying through those mountains.

The exhibition, from 1 July to 29 October 2023, will bring together around 50 works by Jones, including loans from Tate, National Museum Wales and the National Library of Wales. Over 8-10 July, there will be a series of events and a seminar. For more information, contact johngibbs1940@gmail.com.



LOAN TO KINGSWOOD SCHOOL BATH

After the two current exhibitions in Bristol close, ten key works will travel to nearby Kingswood School. Their *Transforming Lives* exhibition will run from 19 April to 11 July, coinciding with the school's 275th anniversary programme and the *Transforming Lives* Methodist Educational International Conference. It is not the first time some of the works have been at Kingswood - the full Collection was housed there in the late '60s and early '70s. An events programme, which will be open to the public, is being organised including a talk by Professor Ann Sumner on Wednesday 17 May (see back cover for more details).

POSTPONEMENT OF EASTBOURNE EXHIBITION

New Vision, the exhibition due to take place at Emmanuel Church Eastbourne this summer, has had to be postponed. Readers may recall that it was to have been hosted in a brand new church building and, unfortunately, completion of this has been delayed. Both the Management Committee and Revd. Paul Tabraham's team remain very enthusiastic and committed and we hope to be able to announce new dates shortly.

ONLINE LECTURE AT EPWORTH

Last November nearly 50 people from across the UK joined Professor Ann Sumner for an online talk organised by Epworth Old Rectory. To ensure maximum accessibility, it was signed by a BSL interpreter. Ann talked about how the Collection came into being, focusing on some key acquisitions and, in particular, *Christ writes in the Dust - the Woman Taken in Adultery* by Clive Hicks-Jenkins, which had been displayed at Epworth as part of the 60th anniversary loans program. A recording is now available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViiuKsxuArU>

Christ writes in the Dust - the Woman Taken in Adultery by Clive Hicks-Jenkins © TMCP

A view from the Chair

Ann Sumner

It is brilliant to see the Collection on display this Spring, with the ground-breaking exhibition at Victoria Methodist Church *Articles of Faith - Where our Paths Meet* and the smaller, focused and reflective display at John Wesley's New Room, *Death to Life*. Over the last few days I have been in Bristol as the two shows came together after months of planning. It's always thrilling to experience our paintings first hand, but it was particularly rewarding for me to watch the new travelling cases in action protecting the works, and to see some of the newly reframed works, such as Dennis Hawkins' *Pentecost*. The hard work of the amazing volunteer team at Victoria was also really inspiring. I would particularly like to thank all of them, and my colleague Corinne Miller, as well as the Royal West of England Academy technicians. Meanwhile, at the New Room, Kate Rogers and her team were efficiently hanging four key works depicting the Crucifixion by F N Souza, William Roberts, Patrick Heron and Michael Edmonds. They look very fine and are beautifully lit.

When the loan to Victoria was proposed by minister Rev. Richard Sharples we were enthusiastic to hear how thoughtfully our works would be displayed. Showing them alongside artefacts from other faith traditions within thematic clusters covering such topics as hope, suffering, hospitality, and compassion, aims to create a common human spirituality, opening up conversations and dialogue. This ambition chimed with our vision for the Collection – 'Seeing the Spiritual'. Victoria's Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim partners all lent to the exhibition as the project developed and are contributing to a lively programme of events put together by Jane Stacey and the planning group. The opening on Saturday 18 February, initially in the splendid newly refurbished galleries at the Royal West of England Academy (thanks to the auspices of the Director Alison Bevan) and then at Victoria Methodist Church itself, was attended by so many supporters and friends



of the Collection. It was a night of great celebration, enthusiasm, music, visual delight and animated discussion.

As a travelling Collection, we are aware of our carbon footprint and look for ways to ensure that we maximise opportunities when we lend. This year, it makes perfect sense for part of the Collection to go on to Kingswood School in Bath (originally founded by John Wesley), which is celebrating its 275th anniversary. So ten key paintings selected by Rev. Katy Thomas, the Chaplain, on the theme of 'Transforming Lives' will be on display in the Cusworth Room from mid April until early July. There

will be plenty of opportunities for both students across the school and, in late April, delegates at the Transforming Lives Methodist Educational International Conference to engage with the works. We thank Katy, the Headmaster Andrew Gordon Brown, and all at the school for their enthusiasm and are pleased to have another excellent opportunity to work with young people. I am very much looking forward to speaking there on 17 May.

Last Autumn, the 60th anniversary events provided an opportunity to meet so many of our supporters in person and online. We were delighted to have some new Friends join as a result and to receive such positive feedback. One event at Woodhouse Grove School, attended by Headteacher James Lockwood, focused on the career of sculptor Frank Roper. Researching his work has been hugely enjoyable and I am delighted to read how the school community is engaging with the sculptures (see page 7). We have renewed old acquaintances and forged new friendships with the 60th anniversary loans.

Sadly, we have one farewell to make with the departure of our Management Committee colleague Verity Smith. Verity has been Convenor of our Exhibitions & Planning Working Sub-Group and has worked to organise our loans with efficiency, dedication and great professionalism. She will be much missed, but we know we shall stay in touch.

Di Stone

In Focus

Scargill House in Kettlewell is home to a Christian community who welcome people for holidays, conferences and retreats in the spectacular Yorkshire Dales. They share hospitality, creativity, fun and really good food together – refreshing and equipping churches, groups and individuals, of all faiths and none. Phil and Di Stone are the leaders of this community. Further details and their programme can be viewed at www.scargillmovement.org

We discovered the Methodist Modern Art Collection around ten years ago when a group of us from the Scargill Community went over to Leyburn to an exhibition there. We were totally unprepared for such an eclectic collection of art and had a wonderful time.

My art journey really began with my parents belonging to a picture library! They would drive off in the car every couple of months and, just like an ordinary library, return having exchanged one painting for another, presumably a painting that had spoken to them and that they were drawn to and so chose to hang it in our living room. I did go with them once and was fascinated by the whole process.

Later, I remember taking my mother with me on my first visit to an art exhibition on Post-Impressionism at the National Gallery. It was an amazing visit. I found myself strolling through the hushed rooms, rubbing shoulders with other viewers, catching their thoughts being shared, and reading the



The Chapel at Scargill House
(photo courtesy of Phil and Di Stone)

offered information. All bringing the paintings and the artist to life. Soon I was entering each room looking for that one piece of work which would catch my attention and speak to me - something that has continued.

Using art for mission and helping people to see the spiritual in their lives certainly links with Phil and myself and with the life and mission of Scargill House. Over many years Phil and I have become aware of how art can inspire and teach the depths and complexities of the Gospel message in a way that gives new and fresh understanding.

We run a programme at Scargill House entitled *Picturing the Gospel* where an aspect of the life of Jesus is seen through the eyes of artists whose gifts not only enrich our understanding of Jesus and the Gospel but also enliven and deepen our prayer life. Our Pathway is our rule of life and here we offer a 'pathway to grow closer to God' through the beauty of art and the Gospel message. Guests are invited and encouraged to come and share their thoughts and ideas. This can be creative and chaotic, challenging and rewarding, but always fun.



Phil and Di Stone (photo courtesy of Phil and Di Stone)

Di and Phil Stone's Choice

As I write this, we have just celebrated Christmas and reading the nativity passages reminded us that they are a gritty account of something amazing happening within the background of extreme hardship and challenge. All the key characters face fear and receive the message: 'Do not be afraid'. A message very relevant for us today. This is why we chose Francis Hoyland's *Nativity Polyptych*. A rather unusual nativity painting with multiple panels creating a narrative reminding us that Jesus was not born in a comfortable bed or in a warm and safe home or at a peaceful period of history. There is a sombre mood taking us away from the traditional and sentimental images of Christ's birth.

Instead, we see an everyday farm building with an exhausted Mary propped up against the manger. Joseph is close by and, like Mary, asleep under a rough blanket on the floor. It is a beautiful, but not particularly a cosy scene. Where is Jesus? Usually the central focal point, but here we find him tucked up in the manger, hardly visible at all. A hanging lantern, giving off a little more light than you might expect, is perhaps a reminder that Jesus is the light of the world or that he has his own path to follow. For now, although exhausted, Mary, Joseph and Jesus are safe.

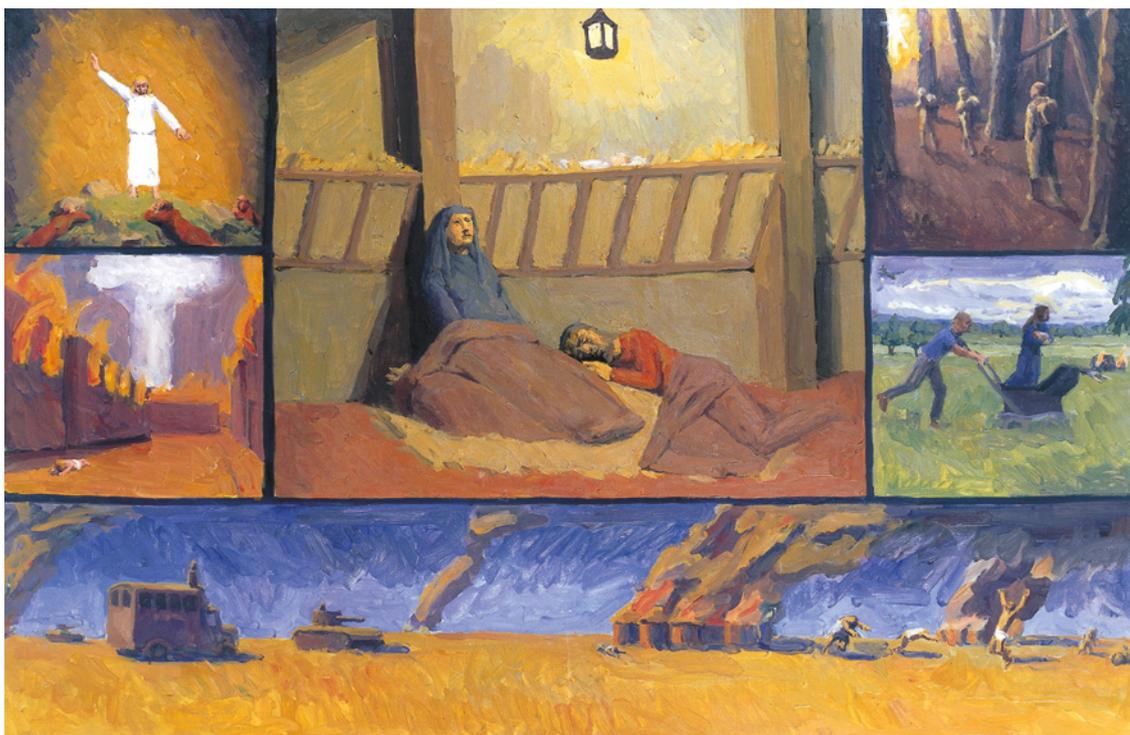
Fear though is all around. The rather formidable angel certainly exudes power and is defiantly on a mission. His message to share with the cowering shepherds, the riffraff of the community is 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great

joy that will be for all the people.' The Magi, three very unregal figures, are back-packing through dangerous-looking Lickey Woods in Birmingham. There must have been something very special to make the Magi set out on such a perilous journey just to follow a star! Underneath we have Mary in her blue gown clutching her child with Joseph firmly pushing a pram through Richmond Park. There is a sense of urgency about this flight into Egypt, there is unease, agitation, fear is in the air. Is this not the flight of all refugees from war, starvation and persecution?

The remaining images portray the Massacre of the Innocents. The bottom left depicts a nuclear attack, with burning buildings and a dead baby in the road, whilst the wider section reveals warfare in the Congo, which was taking place at the time it was painted. It could have been painted today!

All is certainly not well. But the light emanating from the manger remains central. It is where our focus should be and should remain. Hope has been born – it comes in the midst of scandal, disgrace and real fear. John Kurt writes: 'This is what gives Christian hope, its power to redeem and reconcile the most difficult of situations and the most broken of lives. God was born into poverty, in a world of fear and violence, yet overcame them with his love'.

Surely a message relevant for today - that in a world of fear, love wins.



Nativity Polyptych by Francis Hoyland © TMCP Di and Phil Stones' choice from the Collection

Bristol Exhibitions

Articles of faith — Where our Paths Meet

Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol, 20 February–8 April 2023



Three pictures from the Collection (© TMCP) on display with artefacts from other faith traditions at Victoria Methodist Church (photo courtesy of the Editor)

This exhibition is taking place as we go to press. Ann Sumner has written about it on page 3 including some all important thank-yous. I should add a massive thank you to Ann here too.

As seen on our front cover, works from the Collection are being shown with art and artefacts from other faith traditions and collected around universal themes – an innovative, inclusive and inspiring approach.

To encourage as many children as possible to engage with the exhibition, the planning group organised an art competition. Six local schools took part and all the entries are

displayed in a parallel exhibition in the church's undercroft. This is an inspiring display of many thoughtful and thought-provoking pictures on the themes of the exhibition.

On Saturday 18 April, people from the church, the Bristol Hebrew Orthodox Synagogue, Bristol University Islamic Society, the Royal West of England Academy of Art and the Management Committee of the Methodist Modern Art Collection all came together to celebrate the opening of the exhibition and talk about their hopes for it. It was clear that this was a project that had already forged new relationships and brought communities together.

Alongside the exhibition, there will be a series of events, concerts, talks and workshops (including food and Bollywood style dancing). Those scheduled to take place after this Newsletter is distributed are:

- 4 April at 1.00 pm Rev. Richard Sharples will examine some of the 'I am' sayings from St John's Gospel alongside artworks
- 7 April (Good Friday) at 7.30 pm there will be an evening of dramatic readings and music entitled 'At the Foot of the Cross'
- 9 April (Easter Sunday) at 10.30 am Rev. Jonathan Pye, Chair of Bristol Methodist District, will lead the Easter Service at the end of the exhibition.

Death to life: image, expression & symbolism

John Wesley's New Room, Bristol,
18 February – 8 April 2023

In contrast to the size and scope of Victoria's exhibition, this is a small reflective exhibition of four different depictions of the Crucifixion. It brings together works by contrasting twentieth century artists and 'aims to evoke a sense of discovery through meaning, expression and symbolism'. Visitors

are invited to 'examine each [painting] and explore Biblical evidence about what took place', then choose from a selection of words that best describe their response to the paintings. The exhibition is free with admission to the museum.



Francis Souza's *The Crucifixion* on display alongside items for the permanent collection at John Wesley's New Room in Bristol (photo courtesy of the Editor)

Frank Roper at Woodhouse Grove School

Here at Woodhouse Grove School we have four splendid pieces of Frank Roper's art from the Methodist Modern Art Collection, illustrating the *Stations of the Cross*. Their loan was part of the Collection's 60th anniversary programme. We know from our own experience, and from reading scripture, how important art is in our worship and in our appreciation of God's world – how it speaks to us. It adds so much value to the life of the school chapel.

I started as School Chaplain in September 2022. I need to acknowledge that it was the previous Chaplain, Rev. Vicky Atkins, who completed all the hard work on the Roper Project with Professor Ann Sumner and other volunteer members of the Management Committee, including Corinne Miller and Verity Smith. The lengthy process of ensuring these pieces were safely installed happened just before I arrived.

The 'Stations of the Cross' or 'Way of the Cross', 'Way of Sorrows' or 'Via Crucis', refers to a series of images of Jesus Christ on the day of his crucifixion. The 'stations' or stopping points, grew out of imitations of the Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem, a traditional processional route symbolising the believed path Jesus walked to Calvary. Their objective is to help people experience some of the same feelings as those who were there watching Jesus. Not all stations are written in the Bible, but we can imagine they could have happened.

At Woodhouse Grove, the first group to have the opportunity to see Roper's works was the Methodist Yorkshire West District Synod, which met in school in early September. Since then, we have had other church groups visit to hear talks given by Professor Ann Sumner and myself. In school, every week, the different year groups come to chapel. It is part of the rhythm of school life. We all take time out – pupils and staff – to sit and absorb the chapel building, its history and, I hope, words of wisdom from song and scripture and from those who offer Chapel Assemblies.

The Design and Technology department came in with a class of Sixth Formers, as they have been studying moulding and this was a perfect way of showing Roper's technique in which the mould is destroyed in the process, making the pieces of art unique. In a time of mass-produced items, it really hit home to the pupils.

The English department has booked sessions for multiple classes to use the sculptures to discuss 'conflict' and how they speak of an imbalance of power over the weak by those in positions of authority. At the crucifixion, the state and the army used unfair power to subdue those speaking words of love and justice.

The Art department want to book time to bring classes in to explore how this 3-dimensional medium captures the Easter Story in ways that complement the words of scripture. The sculptures push those familiar Easter words to a different level, with contours and depths that speak of the horror and the subsequent glory of the victory story.

The RE department have also already been in with three Year 8 classes, exploring how different faiths use ways to meditate – to draw closer to the divine. Art pieces are one of those ways. The pupils brought in special items to create prayer spaces to help them meditate. The use of objects rather than just words to bring emotions into this space is sometimes something the Methodist Church needs to re-engage with. Our bland and pure chapels speak of a purity which is still relevant, but are they now begging for a new way of engaging with how we see God through art? We know in school that pupils learn using different mediums – the visual being a clear way of expressing educational growth.

Miss Stead is not a teacher and does not have a class. She is one of the Cleaning Team who operate around the whole school, but she is the dedicated staff member here in the chapel. She is happy to share that she is not a person of faith but loves cleaning in the chapel – she loves the peace and quiet of the building. She said that she was moved by *Station 14 – Jesus being laid in the sepulchre*. Resisting dusting was quite a challenge (the art pieces are so delicate they must not be touched) but coming close, the three faces of the mourners gave her a sense of the emotions we all go through when we mourn those we lose.

And finally, there is myself. I get a private viewing for prayer and reflection, and when I come in to change the heating clock - time to just sit and enjoy them. You may be familiar with Rowan Atkinson's character, Mr Bean. In the film *Bean* he is a security guard who works at the National Gallery. They send him to America where, through a misunderstanding, the American hosts think he is a famous Art Professor, not a security guard. Bean does not know that people think he is a Professor and when asked what he does at the National Gallery he answers as a security guard, "I just sit and watch the paintings". This blows everyone's minds. We would do well to emulate Mr Bean – what a joy and privilege to "just sit and watch" and wait for them to speak to us again and again.

Rev. Rob Drost
Chaplain - Woodhouse Grove School

Who was Frank Roper?

Last November Ann Sumner gave a well received lecture at Woodhouse Grove School about the sculptor whose works are on loan there.

I first came across Frank Roper's works when I was at the National Museum of Wales and for many years thought of him as a Welsh artist. In fact, Roper was born in Haworth, Yorkshire in December 1914. His father was a monumental stone mason, as was his grandfather. In 1932 he was awarded an art scholarship entitling him to three years special study at Keighley Art School. There he met his future wife and artistic collaborator, artist Nora Ellison. In 1936 one of his sculptures, *A Shire Horse*, won great acclaim when exhibited in Bradford.

He went on to study at London's Royal College of Art, with Nora, from 1936 – 9. There he was a pupil of Henry Moore. He felt that Moore's main concern was with medium, whereas his was with subject. Looking back in later life, he felt the Royal College of Art had rail-roaded students into one way of seeing. After college, he began teaching at Lincoln School of Art from 1939 – 40, breaking off to help design tanks and minesweepers for the Ministry of Defence.

After the War, Roper initially taught in Sheffield, before moving to Cardiff College of Art where he remained until his retirement in 1973, eventually becoming Head of Sculpture and then

Vice Principal. Initially he had thought of teaching as 'a temporary measure', but he enjoyed it and was a much-loved tutor.

In the '50s, he became interested in aluminium, and is sometimes credited with inventing the process of lost-polystyrene casting, similar to lost wax casting. He would sculpt from a solid block of expanded polystyrene using a hot wire, soldering irons, home-made whittlers and sand-paper. He was renowned for always wearing a suit even when working in the studio. In the photo on page 9 you see him moulding a polystyrene figure. He explained: 'I like to use polystyrene. This is the most direct means of casting. One can enjoy the modelling and realise that the casting is very little effort. Once I've got the thing in polystyrene it's almost finished. The polystyrene is sunk into sand. I use dry sand from one of the beaches down here. You pour metal on top, then the polystyrene vaporises, the metal fills the space where the polystyrene was and you're left with an aluminium casting.'

Church art and architecture in South Wales changed dramatically during the 1940s, when Glyn Simon, Dean of Llandaff Cathedral and later Archbishop of Wales, began restoring the cathedral which had been damaged by wartime bombing. After the sudden death of the cathedral architect, Sir Charles Nicholson, Simon chose a young architect, George Pace, who was beginning to establish his reputation as an ecclesiastical architect. Pace looked to leading artists of the time to work with him - Jacob Epstein and John Piper produced magnificent works for Llandaff Cathedral - and when Pace met Roper in the 1940s they created a partnership that lasted until Pace died in 1975 aged 59. As well as the work in

Llandaff Cathedral, there are examples of Pace and Roper's collaborations all over South Wales, and indeed across England. Roper lived on until 2000.

At Llandaff, Roper created a set of delicately modelled flowers dedicated to Mary, including *Foxglove or Mary's Thimble*, and *Sea Thrift or Mary's Pillow*. In 1966 he produced six bronze plaques below the tomb of St Teilo there, depicting scenes from the saint's life, as well as lettering in the Welsh Regimental Chapel, and the finials over the archdeacon's stall. Roper's work can also be found in Durham Cathedral (Lettering over St Bede's tomb, 1970), Peterborough Cathedral (*The Crucifix*, 1974) and in St Martin le Grand in York (*The Last Supper*, 1968).

Despite receiving many religious commissions, Roper claimed he was not overtly religious but 'instinctively drawn to the Christian feel of humanity'. Although not a churchgoer, he had many friends in the Welsh clergy.

Recent years have seen a real revival of interest in Roper's art, particularly since the centenary of his birth in 2014 which was celebrated with an exhibition in Barry and a memorial service in Llandaff Cathedral. In 2019 a new Frank Roper Centre was set up in the Church of the Resurrection, Ely, Cardiff, as highlighted in our Newsletter at the time. The Church of St Peters, Lords Mead in Wiltshire, built in 1967-68 contains the most extensive fish and varied collection of Roper's ecclesiastical work in England, including sculpture, screens, light fittings, door furniture and etched glass. It also contains stained glass made in collaboration with Nora Roper, including a Stations of the Cross series. Recently, in October 2022, this church was given Grade II listing, highlighting the importance of the interior furniture.

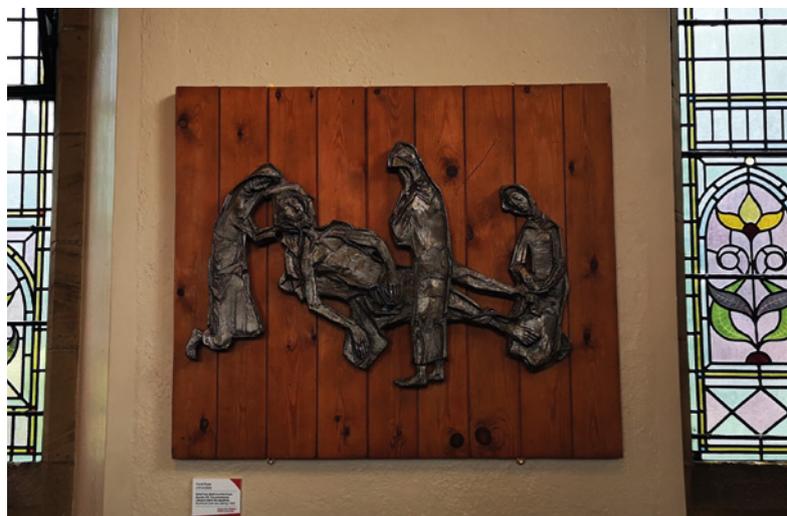
Jesus Meets His Mother from Stations of the Cross, by Frank Roper at St Saviour's, Splott (Photo © Martin Crampin, Imaging the Bible in Wales)





Roper working in polystyrene in his studio in Penarth (photo from Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository)

The Entombment, Jesus is laid in the tomb, Station of the Cross No. XIV by Frank Roper on display at Woodhouse Grove Chapel (© TMCP) (photo courtesy of Ann Sumner)



STATIONS OF THE CROSS

Roper's first *Stations of the Cross* were commissioned for St Martin's in Roath, Cardiff and completed in 1959. The figure sculptures are expressively distorted, showing deep sympathy with medieval art, as well as admiration for Henry Moore. The scenes are mounted directly onto the plastered walls (without wooden backboards as on the Collection's works).

This emaciation and elongation is also present in his *Stations of the Cross* at St Saviour's, Splott, Cardiff created in 1961. These drew criticism from certain parishioners, quoted as saying that they were 'coarse, weird and ugly' and 'much too modern and strange'. Again, the sculpted scenes are mounted directly on to the plastered walls (see photo page 8)

Roper said at the time: 'We have come through a shocking period of art - full of sentimental naturalism. We have to break back into profound realism. We have to show this awful journey to the Cross as something true and vital'.

It is this quality of haunting realism that undoubtedly appealed to Rev. Douglas Wollen when he was looking for works for the Methodist Modern Art Collection. In January 1963 Wollen wrote to Roper explaining his work was being considered for the Collection and Roper commented that this was 'all very exciting'. The Collection's works are replicas of scenes in the *Stations* at St Saviour's, Splott. Roper explained in 1992: 'They are modelled in clay, then plaster moulds made of each. I destroyed ten moulds and kept the four which I

liked the best. It was from these four that I was able to make wax casts and proceed to castings in metal'.

Roper returned to the *Stations of the Cross* in the mid 1970s for another church by George Pace, St Leonard and St Jude's in Doncaster. There, he used lost polystyrene casting and included much more detail, especially in the backgrounds. Rather than mount them on any backing material, he added colour to distinguish them from the brick walls.

We are delighted that our four Roper works are on loan to Woodhouse Grove School, so close to where Roper was born and first trained as an artist.

Ann Sumner

MMAC @ 3Generate

Working with young people is a key mission value of the Management Committee and we are delighted to be able to loan works to Woodhouse Grove School (see page 7) and Kingswood School (see page 2). We reported in the previous Newsletter that a small number of works were on display last Autumn at 3Generate, the Children & Youth Assembly of the Methodist Church. This event was attended by almost 1200 children and young people and over 450 leaders. We can now bring you a fuller report.

Six paintings were selected for loan, working with the Church's Children & Young Peoples' Advisory Group:

- *The Five Thousand* by Eularia Clarke
- *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* by Norman Adams
- *Nativity Polyptych* by Francis Hoyland
- *Untitled - Pentecost* by John Brokenshire
- *The Washing of the Feet* by Ghislaine Howard
- *Dalit Madonna* by Jyoti Sahi

UNTITLED - PENTECOST JOHN BROKESHIRE

- The resurrection of Christ – God's spirit returning to the darkness.
- Light in the darkness – Peace in the storm.
- No matter how dark your life is, the Holy Spirit can rewrite your story and give it a colourful beginning ... do not fear.
- Angels showing hope, the purples show loyalty.
- Spirit of God hanging over the water ... this is my title – I think titles often define how people read paintings. I prefer Untitled.
- I see a dove bringing a message of freedom or hope.
- A dove over the darkness. (The story of my life!).
- Where there is darkness there is always light.
- God will always be our light in our dark time.
- A reminder that God is in the darkness but will not leave us there. God will bring life, light and colour.

'Sim specs', which replicate a number of visual impairments, also allowed visitors to see the works of art as people with different sight conditions might see them. (The facilitators were briefed to help the children and young people understand that visual impairments impacts on life in many different ways and that this activity only provided a limited understanding of visual impairments). Fortuitously, one of the volunteers who helped, Ann-Marie Jenkins, was a former ophthalmic nurse. One respondent said: "When I put on the glasses the picture was not as clear visually, but was just as clear understandably"!

Visitors were invited to fill out labels which could be tied to chains suspended beneath the pictures. These proved popular. Many respondents saw parallels between the images and contemporary life, and it was clear that art can help people of all ages to think deeply about current issues. Here are some of my favourite responses from those collated by Corinne Miller, for whose work we once again give thanks:

Untitled - Pentecost by John Brokenshire © TMCP



DALIT MADONNA

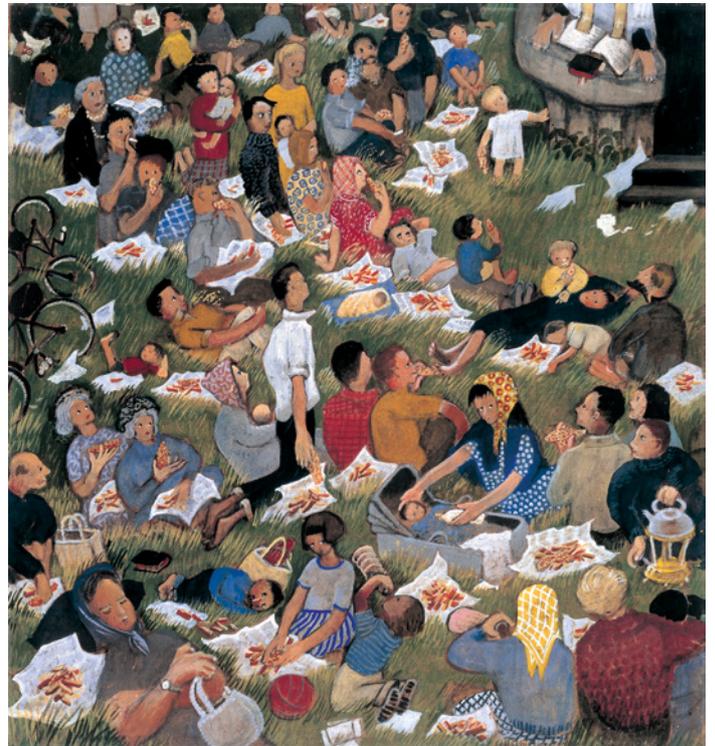
JYOTI SAHI

- I see Mary holding her baby Jesus. Then when I see it with the special glasses, only their love remains.
- I think this mother holds her baby with beautiful love and care. It is wonderful to feel loved.
- Your children become the centre of your whole world.
- The miracle of life, something so small can have such a huge impact; God's actions can be small but powerful.
- You can see inside of Mary's stomach!



Dalit Madonna by Jyoti Sahi © TMCP

The Five Thousand by Eularia Clark © TMCP



'NATIVITY POLYPTYCH'

FRANCIS HOYLAND

(See image on page 5)

- No room for them in the inn.
- The nativity is set in a modern world of conflict - striking and powerful.
- I used to fly nuclear bombers in the RAF. I found this picture tragically moving. Why war?
- This painting reminds me of the suffering of people in Ukraine today. It must be terrible to live in a conflict zone.
- Amazing to be reminded that Jesus and his family were made homeless by political violence.
- I love how this one is about Ukraine and what is happening now.
- The painting represents distress in the countries at war, Russia and Ukraine. Russian citizens are also the victims of war.
- The 'Nativity' is not just a story from the Bible ... it's so close to us.

THE FIVE THOUSAND

EULARIA CLARK

- Jesus says, "You give them something to eat".
- There is a lady with a baby. She seems strangely isolated and nobody appears to be with her. I wondered if she felt judged and uncomfortable - perhaps looking to belong.
- Where am I represented today in this image? Intently listening, distracted, or asleep? Near Jesus or far?
- More than enough food – God's abundant generosity.
- Food justice – to share is divine.
- Sometimes, maybe being together is good enough in God's eyes.
- There is lots of litter – which questions Christians' view of the environment.
- The lady sleeping shows the attitude shown by some Christians – 'present in body, but absent in spirit'.
- Some of my happiest times have been spent sharing food with people. At 3Gen a lovely lady came and sat with me at teatime!

Preparations are already underway for the Collection to be represented at 3Generate in 2023 and Corinne is once again taking the lead.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

In Conversation

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



Figure 1 John N Gibbs and his family 1958 (photo courtesy J N Gibbs)

PART 2

In our last Newsletter we published Part 1 of the discussion between Ann and John, one of the events commemorating the Collection's 60th Anniversary. Here is Part 2.

Ann Sumner: You were born into an artistic household where contemporary art was appreciated. I think that you were born in 1940 the eldest of the five brothers? What was it like growing up in a Modernist house surrounded by a wide range of modern paintings?

John N Gibbs: To provide context, here is a photograph of the five of us with my parents in the family house, Sea Roads (Figure 1). I think that this is a 'Vice Presidential picture', taken just before my father took up that office in the Methodist Church in summer of 1958. I am standing next to my father and behind is *The Stones Cry Out* by the Surrealist artist John Armstrong.

I think I can best answer your question by using the phrase 'an art-accustomed eye'. This was the title of a 2004 exhibition that was the inspiration of my brother William at the National Museum of Wales. It comprised artworks my parents had bought, in some cases to give as presents to their children and grandchildren. 'An art accustomed eye' emphasises the importance of getting to know paintings well. So, for example, there were comfortable chairs in the gallery to encourage people to sit and relax among the pictures. Growing up, we had the benefits of art-accustomed eyes and we all became interested.

You would have been a young man by the time that the Collection was being put together. What was your interest in art at that time?

I was on the science side, but I was also very interested in art and, indeed, I studied it as an extra A level. That interest has always remained strong. But I did not see any of the exhibitions in the Collection's early years.

We have talked about the importance of the 1990 exhibition of the Collection in Penarth as part of a local festival of Christian Arts. Afterwards it was housed at the Methodist Church Department of Education and Youth and made available for loan. Did you see it in Penarth and what were the consequences of that exhibition?

Yes, I did see the Penarth exhibition and back at home – we were living in Farnham in Surrey - I developed the idea of an exhibition there. This took place in 1993. The Farnham Council of Churches backed the scheme and a fully ecumenical planning committee was formed. The local paper had a picture of me handing over a cheque to the administrator of the Art Gallery in the Maltings (Figure 2). It was marvellous to work with a professional curator – yourself.

Yes I was living in Farnham too and working at the Dulwich Picture Gallery as Keeper. I very well remember working with you on that exhibition, and helping hang the Collection.

So this period marked the beginning of a new management approach for the Collection by the Church – tell us how that came about and your role in the new arrangements.

I became progressively more interested in the Collection. For example, my wife Liz and I came to know the work of Mark Cazalet, and helped to arrange for two of his works to be added to the Collection in 1994. His *Fool of God (Christ in the Garden)* (Figure 3) has

been chosen as the key-stone picture for the 2023 *Articles of Faith - Where our Paths Meet* exhibition in Bristol. In 1997, I was asked to



Figure 3 Mark Cazalet's *Fool of God (Christ in the Garden)* © TMCP

be a member of a working group to secure the Collection's future. It was this group that arranged for the church-owned Westminster College of Education in Oxford to provide a home for the Collection. This arrangement continued when, in 2000, the College became part of Oxford Brookes University. For many years, Dr Peter Forsaith combined the part time role of Custodian for the Collection with his administrative and research responsibilities in what is now known as the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History.

Another outcome of the working group was the creation of a team of Managing Trustees – as we were then called – the forerunner of the present Management Committee. I was the Chair of this team and the Rev. Graham Kent was secretary. We were charged with developing an exhibition programme across the UK and preparing interpretative and publicity materials.

As Chair of the Trustees, you oversaw some amazing acquisitions for the Collection and there was real growth. Previously the Collection had its international components - I think of the Rouault engravings and an important Crucifixion by F N Souza - but under your leadership, the acquisitions broadened to a wider world. It would be good to hear about some of those acquisitions and what inspired you to move the Collection in this direction?

Quite early on we formed an acquisitions group and set down various parameters – the quality of the work was to be the most important thing, but subject to this we would seek to fill gaps in the Christian story and, as appropriate, secure more work from outside the UK, by women artists, and so on. The very popular *Dalit Madonna* by the Indian Artist Jyoti Sahi came to us in the early 2000s (see page 14).

We acquired two prints by the Japanese artist Sadao Watanabe made using traditional techniques – paper made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree and natural pigments. They were in the collection of a Roman Catholic priest, Father Bruno Healy, and came to us through the good offices of Leslie Griffiths, when Father Bruno became a hermit in North Wales.



Figure 2 John Gibbs at the Maltings in 1993 (photo courtesy of the Farnham Herald)

Then there were the bold black and white linocuts made by the southern African artist John Muafangejo. We bought these from the collection of John Wheeler, an Anglican priest who knew the artist well.

While you were Chair, was there one particular exhibition that stood out for you, where you really felt it made a major impact? Looked visually appealing? Tell us about this.

Perhaps you will excuse some partisanship in my mentioning a 2013 exhibition called *'Risen! Art of the Crucifixion and Eastertide'* with which I was very much involved. The main display was at the Monnow Valley Art Centre, run by Rupert Otten, just to the east of the Black Mountains in Herefordshire, with important satellite exhibitions in Abergavenny and Hereford. The weather worked against us - it was a late cold spring - but the displays did look very good. Before it went to Monnow Valley, the main works were shown at the Piano Nobile Gallery in West London, together with some other paintings, and from these, I (with strong encouragement from my wife Liz) put forward a proposal that Richard Bavin's *The Empty Tomb* (see back cover) might be added to the Collection. Many people have been much moved by this painting.

What is your favourite work in the Collection now and why?

I looked through the current catalogue *Seeing the Spiritual* when I knew you would be asking me this. So many of the works evoke a positive response! In the end, I came down to a work which I was very much involved in commissioning. This is *Christ writes in the Dust - the Woman Taken in Adultery*, by Clive Hicks Jenkins (see page 2). Thanks initially to my brother William, my wife and I have known Clive and his work for 20 years. Although not a Christian, he has a profound interest in Christian themes and I made several attempts to interest my fellow Trustees in his work. However, it was not until 2009 that things came together. With Clive, I visited the donors, who were celebrating their golden wedding anniversary and wished to commission a work illustrating Jesus's readiness to go beyond the law of the Old Testament. After a lively and fascinating discussion, the subject of Christ writing in the dust was selected. We received the picture into the Collection at an event in Birmingham in 2011.

John, thanks so much for sharing your memories with me and with readers of our Newsletter.

Meeting the Madonna

The very popular Dalit Madonna, by artist Jyoti Sahi, came into the Collection in the early years of this century thanks to the combined efforts of Sarah Middleton (former Management Committee member) and Michael King, then with the Methodist Church's World Church Office. Here, Sarah tells the story of its acquisition and of the thrilling moment she first encountered the Dalit Madonna.

It was September 2002 and I was working at Methodist Church House for the Mission Education Office. I received a phone call from Barbara Butler of the charity Christians Aware. She told me she owned a painting which she thought would lend itself well as a resource for Mission Education. She was a friend of the artist and encouraged me to come and see his painting, hanging in Bishop's House, Southwark, her home at the time.

We arranged to meet at Tooting Bec Tube Station. From there we walked the short distance to her home. I remember accompanying her up the stairs of this imposing house, and being shown into what I recall as a dining room. There, on the wall of this quiet shaded room, hung the large canvas of the *Dalit Madonna* (c 5 ft x 4 ft). I felt humbled in the presence of this Mother and Child, two figures nestled amongst the crescent moon and harvest grain. Although the Dalit woman doesn't make eye contact with the viewer, I was drawn in by her tender gaze and cradling hands. The frisson of this first encounter stays with me.

Barbara indicated that the painting could be transported over to Methodist Church House so that colleagues in the Connexional Team could see it too. So for the ensuing year it hung above the desk of Michael King, then leader of the World Church Office. He and his team were excited about the opportunities offered by this painting - an engaging

and beautiful depiction of a Madonna inspired by the Dalit community in southern India. The Christian faith of the artist was being expressed through a deeply emotional, visually arresting and culturally localised image - Jyoti later articulated its symbolism in a memorable meeting on the 7th floor at 25 Marylebone Road. The kernel of this can be read in the online gallery commentary on the Methodist Church website.

Around 2002 the then Trustees of the Collection were seeking to add works reflecting cultural diversity, not least from continents other than Europe. An opportunity for wider exposure of this painting was presented by the exhibition planned for Summer 2003 at Methodist Central Hall Westminster. Through partnership with their curatorial team, and colleagues in the World Church Office, the *Dalit Madonna* became a 'special guest' at the exhibition, scheduled to overlap with the Methodist Conference in the same venue.

The painting was hung with a label explaining its provenance and inviting comments. Visitors responded enthusiastically. One of the visitors I showed round was artist Unity Spencer. Both Unity and the *Dalit Madonna* came into my life as my late husband, Brian Duckworth, was departing his. I was gratified that Brian, a firm advocate of the Collection, knew about my first encounter with the painting a few weeks before he died.

In November 2003, the then Trustees of the Methodist Modern Art Collection warmly accepted the offer of the *Dalit Madonna* from the World Church Office and so it was formally brought into the Collection, enabling it to be appreciated by thousands.

As well as frequent displays of the original painting, many reproductions of the *Dalit Madonna* have been produced - in poster form, as postcard, Christmas card, electronically and, most recently as a charming jersey. Methodist minister Rev. Caroline Weaver devised her own pattern from studying the painting, and knitted it by hand. It arrived as a surprise gift on my doorstep last September.

The *Dalit Madonna* has truly become a companion over the last 20 years, not least in my offerings as a Local Preacher. For me, as for many, she has become the subject of lectures, discussions, online study, political campaigning and prayer. I give thanks to God for this work of art, its creator Jyoti Sahi, and the journey of faith and discovery on which it has accompanied me.

Sarah Middleton



Sarah wearing the 'Jyoti Jersey' (Photo courtesy of Sarah Middleton)

ELSEWHERE IN THE ART WORLD

THREADS THROUGH CREATION

Friends may recall the article in the Spring 2017 Newsletter about the touring exhibition *Threads through Revelation* showing textile panels by Jacqui Parkinson based around the last book of the Bible. It was seen by 500,000 visitors and visited 15 cathedrals from 2016 to 2018.

Last year saw the launch of her latest tour of works, *Threads through Creation*, based around the first book of the Bible. It is a spectacular sequence of twelve huge textile panels retelling the creation story. Viewers are treated to a wonderful variety of colours, shapes, patterns – and, of course, lots of creatures! It represents three years' work by Jacqui Parkinson.

I was fortunate to see them in Worcester Cathedral last year and it was very evident that visitors found

them moving and breathtaking. They are certainly a resource to feast eyes and minds upon for both the young and old and those of faith and no faith. Readers might like to note the tour venues and dates for 2023 as follows:

22 March to 30 April
Peterborough Cathedral

3 May to 11 June
St Albans Abbey

14 June to 23 July
Ely Cathedral

26 July to 3 September
Rochester Cathedral

6 September to 15 October
Portsmouth Cathedral

18 October to late November
Wells Cathedral

For further details see www.jacqui-textile.com/creation.

Ian Baker

Photos taken at *Threads through Creation* exhibition at Bath Abbey courtesy of Bob Williams



DIGITAL ART EXHIBITION FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT: ART FROM THE HEART

Finally, readers may be interested in an exhibition of beautiful and varied art that they can enjoy from the comfort of their own homes.

Devised by London's National Gallery and museums throughout the UK, *Fruits of the Spirit: Art From the Heart* is a free virtual exhibition. It pairs nine pictures from the National Gallery's collection with nine from partner institutions, including Canterbury Cathedral. Each of the paired artworks "illustrate" a 'Fruit' listed by Saint Paul in his letter to the Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. For example, the theme of Joy is illustrated by Frank Auerbach's 2004 *Mornington Crescent Summer Morning II* and by Van Gogh's 1888 *Sunflowers*.

The interactive technology allows the viewer to 'move' around the gallery using a computer mouse or touch screen, view the artworks, zoom in on details of them, and read the excellent accompanying interpretative labels. The technique takes a little getting used to (especially for those of us who suffer motion sickness!) but it's very worthwhile. To access the virtual exhibition, visit the National Gallery's website nationalgallery.org.uk then click on "Menu", then on "Visit Us", then on "Virtual Tours". It is available until the end of April.

Katharine Farnham-Dear

FORTHCOMING TOURING PROGRAMME

2023

MMAC @ 3GEN

6 to 8 October

The Methodist Church's Children's
and Young Assembly

NEC Conference Centre Birmingham



2024

*Deepening the Mystery 'unexpected
treasures of art'* Welwyn Garden City

1 March to 7 April 2024

Focolare Centre for Unity,

69 Parkway, Welwyn Garden City,

AL8 6JG

Website: www.focolare.org

Contact: Paul Gateshill

paulghill@hotmail.com



Focolare are promoting their exhibition with Richard Bavin's *The Empty Tomb* © TMCP

TALK AT KINGSWOOD SCHOOL CHAPEL

On Wednesday 17 May 7.00 pm,
Professor Ann Sumner will deliver an
illustrated talk, exploring the 60 year
history of the Collection and focusing
on key works on loan to the school:
*Transforming Lives: The Story of the
Methodist Modern Art Collection*. This
will be followed by an opportunity
for questions and a chance to see the
Transforming Lives exhibition.

For further details please contact School
Chaplain, Rev. Katy Thomas [kthomas@](mailto:kthomas@kingswood.bath.sch.uk)
[kingswood.bath.sch.uk](mailto:kthomas@kingswood.bath.sch.uk)

FURTHER MMAC LINKS IN BRISTOL GARRY FABIAN-MILLER: ADORE

Running at the same time as the
exhibitions in Wesley's New Room and
Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol's
Arnolfini Gallery is hosting a major
exhibition celebrating a lifetime of
work by the inventive and original
photographer, Garry Fabian-Miller.
Titled *Adore*, the exhibition includes
works from Fabian-Miller's own
collection by artists that have inspired
him, including two artists represented
in the Collection. Visitors can see
Mehefn, a watercolour by David Jones
(courtesy of Museum Wales), and

Nativity with Cross and Stars, one of
his wood engravings; as well as *Untitled*
and *Crucifixion with Boy*, both by
Craigie Aitchison. It is easy to see how
the painstaking craftsmanship and
connection with place found in Jones's
work, and the glorious use of colour
found in Aitchison's, might have
influenced the beautiful, meditative
images created by Fabian-Miller. *Adore*
is free and runs until 28 May.

COLLECTION TO FEATURE AT DISTRICT SYNOD

Ahead of the exhibition at Welwyn
Garden City, Management Committee
stalwart Rev. Graham Kent has accepted
an invitation to be a keynote speaker at
the Autumn Synod of the Bedfordshire,
Essex and Hertfordshire Methodist
District. One of the functions of the

District Synod is to provide inspiration
to leaders of the Circuits within the
District. Graham is exceptionally well
placed to do this having been involved
with using the Collection in mission
for over 25 years.