

The Formation of a Patron

One of the frustrations of both the Hussey Papers and *Patron of Art* is the scarcity of material from which to reconstruct Hussey's formation. He was born in 1909, the younger son of John Rowden Hussey, vicar of St Matthew's Northampton from its foundation in 1893, and his wife, born Lilian Mary Atherton. Rowden Hussey was the son of a gentleman farmer from Wiltshire, who was also a churchwarden and influenced by John Wordsworth, bishop of Salisbury. After tuition from Wordsworth himself, schooling at Marlborough College, and then Salisbury Theological College, Rowden Hussey was ordained in 1888, and soon after came to take charge of a new mission church in a new suburb of Northampton.¹ Walter Hussey's elder brother, Christopher Rowden Hussey, was also ordained in the Church of England, in 1931, a short while before Hussey.

Little evidence remains of Hussey's schooling at the Knoll, a preparatory school at Woburn Sands, now near Milton Keynes. A small school, it had been founded with seven pupils in 1892 by Edward F. Miller, returned from Ceylon where he had been archdeacon of Colombo. H.E. Ryle, later bishop of Winchester, was one of the first parents to send a child to the school. It was still headed by a clergyman, F.F. Hort, when Hussey arrived, and the pupils all attended the parish church on Sundays.

¹M.C. Harrison (1993) *The centenary history of St Matthew's church and parish, Northampton* (Edinburgh: Pentland), p. 1.

A photograph of the school chapel shows a plain space, which fitted the relatively undistinguished building in which it was located.²

From The Knoll, Hussey won a scholarship to Marlborough College in 1922. In 1924, he was confirmed in the college chapel, and took his first communion shortly after in Northampton from the hands of his father. Slightly older than Hussey, but friendly with brother Christopher, was John Betjeman; also at the school at the same time were the poet Louis Macneice and the art historian Anthony Blunt. Betjeman's biographer, A.N. Wilson, noted that the hearty ethos of a place such as Marlborough, as well as the spartan conditions that Betjeman later recorded in his *Summoned by Bells*, can hardly have been congenial to a young aesthete.³ The fact that Hussey was a keen hockey player may have given him some cover, and his continuing for a while to play the game for a team of Old Marlburians, captained by the bishop of London, suggests that his time there was not unhappy.⁴ In any case, he was able to find some things at Marlborough to occupy his imagination. As Garth Turner observed, Hussey progressed through a series of Gothic Revival buildings in his passage from Northampton to Marlborough, Keble College, Cuddesdon College, St Mary Abbots and back to Northampton.⁵ The chapel at Marlborough was the subject of photographs Hussey took in 1923, as was St Matthew's.⁶ A sketch book, dating from the years at Marlborough, contains several capable drawings and watercolours, including one of the choir of St Matthew's.⁷

From Marlborough, Hussey went up to Keble College, Oxford in 1927, to read politics, philosophy and economics (PPE). Hussey's published writings in his later career show no particular depth of learning or flair in expression, and this seems to have been the pattern at school and then at university. Several school reports from Marlborough survive,

²The Knoll, Aspley Heath, at <http://www.mkheritage.co.uk/wsc/docs/knollschool.html>, accessed 5 October 2016.

³A.N. Wilson (2006) *Betjeman* (London: Hutchinson), pp. 37–40.

⁴Diary entry for 19 December 1928, at MS Hussey 32.

⁵G. Turner (1992) "Aesthete, impresario and indomitable persuader": Walter Hussey at St Matthew's, Northampton and Chichester Cathedral,' *Studies in Church History*, 28, 523–535, at 523.

⁶Log book of photos taken in and before 1923, at MS Hussey 23.

⁷Sketchbook at MS Hussey 52.

showing a pupil of no particular note.⁸ At the end of Hussey's second year at Oxford, his tutor, E.M. Hugh-Jones, gently suggested that the Honours School for PPE might be rather too difficult for him. The impressions of Hussey's philosophy tutor were not improving over time, and in economics he fared little better. As Hussey was considering ordination, Hugh-Jones suggested he might transfer to something less demanding without damaging his prospects; on his current course, a third-class degree was the most he could hope for, and even that was not certain.⁹ The advice was evidently not taken, and third-class honours in PPE were indeed what Hussey obtained, in 1930.

If relatively little is recorded of his academic career, there are indications of a burgeoning interest in music. One friend in Oxford was Ralph Downes, organ scholar of the college and later organist of the Brompton Oratory. Hussey's papers include the third trombone part of Downes' *13 O'Clock Music*, autographed by the composer, which was evidently written for the Keble Plays of 1928, and played by the New Oxontrics dance band, of which Hussey was a member.¹⁰ Hussey was also a member of the Oxford Orchestral Society, playing works by Haydn, Weber and Schubert amongst others.¹¹ An early favourite was Elgar, with whom Hussey initiated and then kept up a frequent if rather one-sided correspondence until Elgar's death in 1934. Elgar seems to have arranged for Hussey to attend rehearsals in London, although the great man dealt briskly with Hussey's attempts to guess the true identity of the famous theme of the 'Enigma' Variations: 'No: Auld Lang syne will not do.'¹² Sometime in the spring or early summer of 1931, during a spell as a schoolmaster before entering Cuddesdon College to train for ordination, Hussey also saw his first opera at Covent Garden: Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*.¹³ While at Cuddesdon he purchased the first piece in his personal

⁸School reports at MS Hussey 23.

⁹E.M. Hugh-Jones to WH, 20 March 1929, at MS Hussey 24.

¹⁰Manuscript at MS Hussey 311; a card announcing Downes' marriage in 1929 is at MS Hussey 312; programme for the Keble Plays at MS Hussey 24.

¹¹Diary entry, 24 October 1928, at MS Hussey 32.

¹²Elgar to WH, 24 January 1930, and 6 October 1931, both at MS Hussey 315.

¹³W. Hussey (1985) *Patron of Art. The revival of a great tradition among modern artists* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson), p. 14.

art collection: a theatre design for a student production of *Romeo and Juliet*, acquired in February 1932.¹⁴

It was on the subject of Elgar that Hussey was first published, in the *Musical Times* for 1931: a piece written around or soon after the time Hussey received his degree. Although immature and in places naive, not to say gushing in its adulation of Elgar, the article contains the seeds of an understanding of music that, once translated into Christian terms, would remain with him throughout his career. Music, Hussey thought, had a quality of ‘emotionalism’ that ‘corresponds with a quality present, in a greater or less degree of quantity and refinement, in the characters of human beings.’ One species of this was ‘emotion springing from reaction to a view of life or a philosophy’. For the young Hussey, Elgar struck the perfect balance between the ‘neurotic intimacy’ of Tchaikovsky, on the one hand, and an arid suppression of emotion that Hussey detected in Brahms, on the other. In the ‘Nimrod’ variation from the Enigma Variations, Hussey found ‘self-control and reserve, and yet was ever music charged with a more profound and deeper emotion?’ Despite much of what was said of the English and their ‘stolid and phlegmatic character, this emotional quality properly controlled is typical of a good many Englishmen.’¹⁵ Great music was a response to the deepest human emotions, appropriately refined and directed. There was but a short distance to travel from here to Hussey’s more mature view of the creative process, examined in its later Christianised form later in this chapter.

ORDINATION

By April 1930, near the end of his time at Oxford, Hussey had been informally accepted into Cuddesdon College, near Oxford, to train for ordination.¹⁶ Practically no indication survives of the development of his vocation. Many years later, his trusted secretary at Chichester, Hilary Bryan-Brown, wondered how strong a vocation Hussey had felt in

¹⁴D. Coke and N. Colyer (1990) *The Fine Art Collections. Pallant House, Chichester* (Chichester: Pallant House), p. 5.

¹⁵W. Hussey (1931) ‘Emotionalism in the music of Elgar’, *Musical Times* 72, n.1057 (March 1st), pp. 211–212.

¹⁶Eric Graham to WH, 1 April 1930, at MS Hussey 25.

fact.¹⁷ Although it cannot be known with any certainty, it is possible that Hussey's move to ordination was simply a matter of following the profession of both his father and his brother. Christopher Hussey was ordained in September 1931 after also studying at Cuddesdon. In 1930, Hussey was too young to enter training straight away and so, at the advice of Eric Graham, principal of the college, he spent a period of time working as a schoolmaster at Charleston in Sussex. Of this episode little trace remains, although (as will be seen in Chap. 3), Hussey was able to relate well to school-age boys, as choristers or as pupils. If Hussey was tempted by a life of teaching, he resisted the temptation, and began his studies at Cuddesdon in the summer of 1931.¹⁸

One key source of encouragement during his training seems to have been Thomas Banks Strong, bishop of Oxford. After having lived in a community of young men as dean of Christ Church Oxford for nearly two decades from 1901, Strong had returned from being bishop of Ripon to take up residence at Cuddesdon Palace, opposite the college, in 1925. One of Strong's chief enthusiasms was the development of the ordinands. Eric Graham thought him 'a genius at dealing with young men', making a point of inviting every ordinand to dine alone with him at least twice; his attitude had 'no hint of anything official [but only] sheer spontaneous friendliness'.¹⁹ With Hussey, the connection must surely have been aided by a common enthusiasm for music. Strong was an organist, pianist, minor composer and (like Hussey) a brass player, in Strong's case, the French horn. His taste was eclectic, and his attitude to new music receptive. On hearing of Hussey's appointment as curate of the church of St Mary Abbots in Kensington in 1932, Strong wrote: 'of course, I have not known you long but we have got rather near together, and I have the utmost confidence in you'.²⁰ The correspondence continued after Hussey left Cuddesdon, and amongst the few surviving works of theology that Hussey retained in his library was Strong's *Religion*,

¹⁷H. Bryan-Brown (2007) 'Hussey at the Deanery', in P. Foster (ed.) *Chichester Deans. Continuity, commitment and change at Chichester Cathedral, 1902–2006* (Chichester: University of Chichester), p. 72.

¹⁸Graham to WH, 1 April 1930, at MS Hussey 25.

¹⁹H. Anson (1949) *T.B. Strong. Bishop, musician, Dean, Vice-chancellor* (London: SPCK), pp. 71–72, 115–125.

²⁰Strong to WH, 13 July 1932, at MS Hussey 434.

Philosophy and History (Oxford, 1923), autographed by its author in 1931.²¹

St Mary Abbots was another stop on Hussey's tour of Gothic Revival buildings, designed by George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1872. Just to the west of Kensington Palace, it was an area of no small social significance, and Scott was commissioned to build on a scale 'proportioned to the opulence and importance of this great Metropolitan parish.'²² St Mary's was a church in which the children of the aristocracy were married, which may have both suited and further fostered Hussey's taste for the company of the elite, as well as widening his range of contacts.²³ Importantly, the Royal Albert Hall and the Victoria and Albert Museum were within a mile's walk. A short bus ride east took him to the Royal Academy of Arts, and the galleries and art dealerships of Mayfair. It was also an area of London which Hussey knew already. As a student in 1928, he had heard the great Russian bass Fyodor Chaliapin sing at the Royal Albert Hall, and afterwards viewed the London skyline from the roof of a flat of a friend very near the church: 'although not very clear it is wonderful & quite captivating. I love London', he wrote.²⁴ Hussey recalled that during this time his tastes in art widened, as he frequented the Tate Gallery and the Bond Street Galleries, all within easy reach. It was also during this time that Hussey cemented an interest in the operas of Wagner. He had seen *Tristan und Isolde* at Covent Garden in 1931; in the company of the rural dean of Kensington, H.H. Lowe, he saw the same opera in 1936, with Kirsten Flagstad, also at Covent Garden.²⁵

In between two spells at St Mary Abbots, Hussey spent a year (1935–1936) as curate in charge of the church of St Paul, Vicarage Gate, a chapel of ease to St Mary Abbots. The church no longer exists, having been damaged by bombing during the war and not rebuilt. There were

²¹Hussey's copy was among those he gave to the library of Chichester Cathedral; it remains part of the library's holdings.

²²(1973) *The Survey of London. Volume 37: Northern Kensington* (London: London County Council), as at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp25-41>, accessed 1 February 2017.

²³Order of service for the wedding of the Hon. James Lindsay and the Hon. Bronwen Scott-Ellis, 1933, at MS Hussey 110.

²⁴Diary entry, 14 October 1928, at MS Hussey 32.

²⁵Hussey, *Patron of Art*, pp. 3, 14.

Image 2.1 Hussey shortly after his ordination. Image from WSRO MS Hussey 65



offers of other opportunities during Hussey's time in London, which suggest something of the potential he was thought to have (Image 2.1). Twice he was offered positions as chaplain to one of the bishops: work which gave an unparalleled insight into the workings of the higher echelons of the church, and which, in many men's careers, was the prelude to occupying higher office themselves. A.F. Winnington-Ingram, bishop of London, and like Hussey, an alumnus of both Marlborough College and Keble, invited Hussey to join his staff at Fulham Palace in late 1934, just as Hussey had set a course for St Paul's.²⁶ Hussey seems to have been reluctant to leave parish work, a decision which one of his advisors in a position to judge thought a sound one. Henry de Candole, later bishop of Knaresborough, had been on the teaching staff at Marlborough while

²⁶Winnington-Ingram to WH, 23 January 1935, at MS Hussey 91.

Hussey was a pupil, and then chaplain to the archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson. Writing as a parish priest in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, he was glad that Hussey had opted to stay in the parishes: pastoral work was to be preferred every time.²⁷ Two years later, a similar offer was to come from Nugent Hicks, bishop of Lincoln, which Hussey appears to have declined on much the same grounds, but also due to some unspecified personal consideration.²⁸

Hussey later recalled that, although he had been very happy as a parish priest, 'I had always felt that the most desirable job in the Church of England would be to be Dean of an ancient and beautiful cathedral, preferably not too far from London.'²⁹ In 1936, there hove into view a prospect that must have tested Hussey's resolve rather more than being a bishop's chaplain. C.C. Thicknesse, newly appointed dean of St Albans—just such an ancient building within very easy reach of the capital—sounded Hussey out about the prospect of coming to St Albans as subdean. Thicknesse was another Marlborough and Keble man, and also son of another of the clergy in Northampton, and had known John Rowden Hussey since childhood. Hussey thought that he should be very happy to take the position, but the scheme was derailed by concern amongst others at St Albans about Hussey's age.³⁰

ART AND THEOLOGY IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND BEFORE 1943

Hussey's early formation as priest and as lover of the arts also took place in a wider context. This study is not the place for an exhaustive survey of the state of the visual arts in the Church of England, but the actual state of affairs is of secondary importance when set alongside a powerful negative story that had taken hold amongst some modern artists and the critics that moved in the same circles. The artist Hans Feibusch, writing in 1947 but looking back over a career of thirty years, wrote of the 'horrible, degraded things that commercial unscrupulousness has foisted

²⁷ De Candole to WH, 29 December 1934, at MS Hussey 91.

²⁸ B.F. Simpson (bishop of Kensington) to WH, 30 September 1936, at MS Hussey 93.

²⁹ Hussey, *Patron of Art*, p. 100.

³⁰ Thicknesse to WH, 16 March 1936, at MS Hussey 92, et ff.

on to [the Church]; of modern art she knows nothing.³¹ For the critic Eric Newton, one of Hussey's early supporters, it was both strange and tragic that Christianity, having 'inspired so many of the most vital and surprising masterpieces of the past, should now be content with painting and sculpture, so effete, so emasculated.'³² Were there really no serious figures working for the church in the 1930s who were both commercially scrupulous and not given to affected prettiness? The architect Ninian Comper was one, working in the tradition of Gothic Revival; the designer Martin Travers worked in a neo-Baroque style for many Anglican churches of the Anglo-Catholic wing. However, men such as these were often neglected in the telling of this particular story, which rested on a specific reading of religious and artistic history. Part of that story was the medieval past.

For Hans Feibusch, the Church in former ages was 'art's greatest patron; from her there flowed to the artist an unending stream of ecstasy, deepest emotion, vision, symbols and images, to which he answered by lavishing on her glorification all his creative power, all his inventiveness and all the beauty he could gather.'³³ This relationship reached its apogee in the Baroque period, and subsequently broke down. At the end of Hussey's career, Kenneth Clark, a considerable art historian as well as a patron, placed Hussey's work in the same history of Christian patronage of the arts. Enlightened individual patrons had produced great works of art, from Aethelwold at Winchester Cathedral, to Pope Julius II and the Sistine Chapel, through to the support of the Earl of Shrewsbury for Pugin. 'And then? Full stop.' For Clark, Hussey was the only English churchman with the 'courage and insight to maintain—I wish I could say revive—the great tradition of patronage by individual churchmen.'³⁴ For the critic Edward Sackville-West, the causes of this breakdown were the rise of 'Puritanism', the Church's loss of its grip on the aristocracy and the wars of religion. From then on, the Protestant church capitulated to a secular spirit, of 'hard-heartedness and avarice disguised as

³¹H. Feibusch (1946) *Mural Painting* (London: A. & C. Black), p. 90.

³²E. Newton (1945) 'Art and the Church Today', *London Calling* 283 (March) 11–12, at p. 11.

³³Feibusch, *Mural Painting*, p. 89.

³⁴K. Clark (1975) 'Dean Walter Hussey. A tribute to his patronage of the arts' in Hussey (ed.) *Chichester 900* (Chichester: Chichester Cathedral), pp. 68–72.

austerity....Religion, deprived of eyes and ears, went into a long doze'.³⁵ Only the Oxford Movement had begun to repair the damage. Whatever their failings as history, and their differences on timing and precise causes, these various accounts were clear about the overarching narrative: the Church had once been a great patron of art, a position it had since lost, to the detriment of both the church and the artist.

Despite this narrative of a philistine church and its neglect of the artist—a rhetorical device on the part of those outside it—there was, between the wars, significant thinking within the Church of England's Catholic wing that provided Hussey with intellectual cover. Percy Dearmer is now best known for his work on the form of Anglo-Catholic worship and the highly influential *English Hymnal*. However, Dearmer was also Professor of Ecclesiastical Art at King's College London from 1919, and a prolific writer on the subject.³⁶ In 1924, Dearmer surveyed the development of Christian art, also seeking to correct a misreading of history. The misreading Dearmer detected was not quite that which Clark identified, but their two accounts agreed on the result: 'the general notion among pious folk in the nineteenth century was that art was rather wrong, while the poets and artists of Europe generally considered that religion was rather stupid.'³⁷ There was much work to do in reacquainting the church and the artist.

Unlike critics and artists, Dearmer and others had also a theological reason to assert that this was to misread not only history but theology as well. There was, he thought, a growing rejection of 'both the bleak indifference of our puritan tradition and the decadent hedonism which was a reaction against it...we are less tempted to regard the arts because of their delightfulness as a mere pastime; we are discovering that in them we touch the eternal world—that art is in fact religious. The object of art is not to give pleasure, as our fathers assumed, but to express the highest spiritual realities. Art is not only delightful: it is necessary.'³⁸

³⁵E. Sackville-West (1947) 'Art and the Christian Church', *Vogue* (March), p. 114.

³⁶D. Gray (2000) *Percy Dearmer: A parson's pilgrimage* (Norwich: Canterbury Press), pp. 128–129.

³⁷P. Dearmer (1924) 'Christianity and Art' in Dearmer (ed.) *The Necessity of Art* (London: SCM), p. 31.

³⁸P. Dearmer (1924) 'Preface' in Dearmer, *The Necessity of Art*, p. v.

As we shall see, this very general sense of the religious nature of art was at the root of Hussey's own view. It was, however, based on a more formalised theology of the relationship between art, the created world and the work of the artist. William Temple, occupant of Lambeth Palace as Hussey began his artistic project at Northampton, attempted more than once to articulate a Christian philosophy of art: 'Art aims at revealing the value of the world [and] to reveal values by the creation of essential symbols', wrote Temple in 1917. But there was a danger ever attendant on the artist: 'In thus concentrating attention upon itself, [art] claims to be all-satisfying. It gathers all the elements of life within its embrace. Perfect Beauty is thus attained; but the work of art is become a Sacrament and the aesthetic experience is passing into religion.'³⁹

A more commonplace version of this notion of the work of art as a sacrament, and the act of creating as a religious act, was to be found frequently among artists and churchmen alike. Clifford Musgrave, Director of the Brighton Libraries and Galleries, introduced an exhibition in a Brighton church in the following terms. The pictures were not of religious subjects, but:

they embody as fully as any purely ecclesiastical painting the moral principles which all true art expresses. There is the deeply religious sense of the poetry and intensity of human life and natural phenomena, the perception of truth and fearless integrity in giving expression to that particular vision, and a toleration of nothing less than perfection. These are the principles on which all true art must depend whatever its nature and purpose.⁴⁰

The notion of the vocation of the artist was connected with a search for a renewed Christian theology of work, and the need to reverse a perceived alienation of the worker from his labour. Much thought had been given both before and during the Second World War to the place of the worker in industrial civilisation and how to make concrete the principle of '*laborare est orare*'.⁴¹ For George Bell, the engagement of artists

³⁹W. Temple (1917) *Mens Creatrix* (London: Macmillan), p. 127.

⁴⁰Draft description of 'Pictures in Churches' loan scheme: Lambeth Palace Library, Bell Papers, vol. 151, f. 13.

⁴¹See, for example, the contributions of J.M. Heron and Philip Mairet to M.B. Reckitt, ed. (1945) *Prospect for Christendom* (London: Faber), 70–84, 114–126. Similar themes are latent in the discussions of William Temple's conference at Malvern in 1941: W.

in work for the church was part of a wider vision of the nature of the church community and its relationship with the society in which it was set. 'Man's life, man's interests, man's gifts, should be brought there for a special consecration.... And in the offering of a man's gifts, his labour and his sacrifice, the art not only of the architect, but of the sculptor, the painter and the craftsman has each its peculiar significance.'⁴² Sir Eric Maclagan, speaking at Northampton at Hussey's invitation, took as his text the words of the catechism on the duty to 'learn and labour truly to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me.' It was thus for the artists to 'devote themselves to their Art... all serving God, certainly not only (perhaps in some cases, not at all) in specifically religious work.'⁴³ In this scheme, the artist had as clear a vocation to serve as the priest.

Neither was it the case that this thinking was accessible only in expensive academic books or specialist periodicals. From the late 1920s, the journal *The Modern Churchman*, representative of the more modernist theology, carried articles on theological aesthetics, as did its more Catholic rival *Theology*, which also reviewed exhibitions.⁴⁴ Even from within the Evangelical constituency, historically amongst the least disposed towards the visual arts, the question was being asked: 'ought we to have more of beauty in our churches?'⁴⁵ An indication that the topic was becoming more generally debated was the publication in 1944 by the SCM Press of *Art, religion and the common life*, by the Quaker Horace Pointing, in a pocket pamphlet form priced at one shilling and sixpence.⁴⁶ Increasing Roman Catholic interest in the subject is evident

Temple (ed.) (1941) *Malvern 1941. The life of the church and the order of society* (London: Longmans and Green), *passim*.

⁴² Bell, 'The church and the artist' *The Studio* 124, no. 594, (1942) 81–92, at 87, 90.

⁴³ Sermon given on 26 May 1946, printed as *Five Sermons by Laymen* at MS Hussey 114.

⁴⁴ L. Hunter (1926) 'The arts in relation to the sacraments' *Modern Churchman* 16, p. 68; T.S.R. Boase (1943), 'Religion and art' *Theology* 46, 241–248.

⁴⁵ A.W. McClymont (1943) 'The beautiful in the divine order', *Evangelical Quarterly* 15, 279–291.

⁴⁶ H.B. Pointing (1944) *Art, religion and the common life* (London: SCM).

from the attempt to found *Modern Sacred Art*, intended to be an ‘international annual review’ and edited and published in the UK.⁴⁷

Of course, September 1939 saw the outbreak of war, and all these themes were overlaid with new and rather more pressing concerns, with the very real possibility of a German imposition of fascism on the British. As Peter Stansky and William Abrahams have pointed out, it was not inevitable that such times should produce an upsurge in artistic activity; the conflict of 1914–1918 had not.⁴⁸ However, both the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (J.M. Keynes’ predecessor to the Arts Council) and Kenneth Clark’s War Artists Advisory Committee were motivated by a practical concern that the arts should not be a casualty of the war.⁴⁹ This was partly for the sake of the artists themselves, but also a statement about the importance of culture and the existential threat that Hitler posed. To preserve and foster the arts was, in itself, an act of resistance. It was not only English or British culture that was being fought for, but also ‘Christian civilisation’: the moral and cultural project common to all Europe which Hitler appeared to upend. The architect Charles Reilly regarded Hans Feibusch’s mural for St Wilfrid’s, Brighton in 1940 as a flower of the pre-war civilisation of Europe now under existential threat. Once a German, now an Englishman, Feibusch had now added something of permanent worth that went some way to offset the evils of the age.⁵⁰

Not all British churchmen were entirely comfortable with some of the rhetoric of ‘Christian civilisation’, fearful of a repeat of the bellicosity that marked the early years of the 1914–1918 conflict, and preferring to emphasise instead the need for radical change at home.⁵¹ But for many, including George Bell, there was much to preserve and also an

⁴⁷ J. Morris (ed.) (1938) *Modern Sacred Art. An international annual review* (London: Sands).

⁴⁸ P. Stansky & W. Abrahams (1994) *London’s Burning. Life, death and art in the Second World War* (London: Constable), p. 2.

⁴⁹ See the first chapter of B. Foss (2007) *War paint. Art, war, state and identity in Britain, 1939–1945* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).

⁵⁰ This typescript address was enclosed with a letter from Reilly to Bell, 24 June 1940, at Bell Papers vol. 150, ff. 248–249.

⁵¹ K. Robbins (1993) ‘Britain, 1940 and “Christian civilisation”’, in Robbins, *History, religion and identity in modern Britain* (London: Hambledon) pp. 195–213, at pp. 202–203.

opportunity. The revival of the arts was part of the cure, for behind the actual war of 1939 there ‘lies the spiritual war. There is a totalitarianism of democracy as well as of dictatorship. The life of the spirit is no less gravely threatened by the mechanisation of culture which the former causes than by the brutal tyranny of the latter.’ Fundamentally, European civilisation had fallen out of communion with its source and the arts could help reunite them.⁵²

HUSSEY’S THEOLOGY OF ART

Although Hussey had many opportunities—in sermons, in a cluster of printed articles in the 1940s, in broadcasts and in interviews with the press—he seldom expanded on the theological justification for his patronage of the arts. Perhaps to make room for the details of the commissions themselves, Hussey’s account in *Patron of Art* of why he should be doing what he did was minimal.⁵³ Hussey preferred to allow others to speak for him once a piece of art was complete, and to take advice during its making. However, he left enough writing, across a long range of time and in various forms, from which his theology of the arts may be reconstructed.

‘Of course’, wrote Hussey, in concluding *Patron of Art*, ‘the commissioning of works of art, with which this book has been solely concerned, formed only a small part of my work, but I believe that it is an important part and one that has a wide influence’.⁵⁴ In the writing of this book the present author reached a rather different conclusion: that Hussey’s record suggests that the arts occupied the commanding heights in his thinking and action, to the exclusion of almost everything else. Trevor Beeson, himself dean of Winchester, and previously canon of Westminster, thought that Hussey had been emptied out of the Anglo-Catholicism in which he had been raised, to leave behind only a liberal Christian Platonism, in which ‘art and music, rather than the redemptive message of the gospel, now nourished his soul’. For Beeson, this process was complete by the time Hussey reached Chichester in 1955.⁵⁵

⁵²G. Bell (1942) ‘The church and the artist’, *The Studio* 124, n. 594, 90.

⁵³Hussey, *Patron of Art*, p. 3.

⁵⁴Hussey, *Patron of Art*, p. 146.

⁵⁵T. Beeson (2004) *The Deans* (London: SCM Press), p. 187.

Tom Devonshire Jones made the same point, but more sympathetically; Hussey's enjoyment of the arts was 'more than a recreation [but something that] amounted to a whole outlook on culture, faith, home and everyday life.'⁵⁶ Beeson's point may stand insofar as Hussey may well have drawn most inspiration from the arts; the sources do not survive with which to determine the state of his personal devotional life. There is, however, enough theology from Hussey's pen to suggest that, far from being an aberration as Beeson suggests, Hussey's thought was in close alignment with much of those Anglican Catholic writers dealt with above. It also remained consistent throughout his career.

Invited in 1949 to write for *The Studio*, an art periodical, Hussey argued that a piece of religious art had two purposes: 'it should adorn God's House with as worthy an offering of man's creative spirit as can be managed, and it should convey to those who see it some aspect of the Christian truth.'⁵⁷ Speaking to a Christian audience in Chichester shortly before he retired in 1977, he described the second of these two purposes in essentially the same terms: the aim of the artist was 'to see clearly, to understand, to contemplate, and to express his experience with honesty.' The artist 'may, by forcing us to share his vision, lead us to the spiritual reality that lies behind the sounds and sights that we perceive with our senses.'⁵⁸

As well as conveying truth, for Hussey, the work itself was an offering, as was the effort of the artist in making it. The artist may well enjoy the act of making, and at some level feel compelled to do it, but 'whether he is entirely conscious of it or not, [he does it] because it is an act of worship which he must make.' Hussey was fond of quoting Benjamin Britten's comment to him that 'ultimately all one's music must be written to the glory of God'. Here, Hussey's thinking shared the pervasive sense that the act of making was in itself religious in some way. Not only was the act of making of spiritual importance for the artist personally, it symbolised important things to the Christian community for which he or

⁵⁶T. Devonshire Jones (2007) 'The legacy: the public figure' in P. Foster (ed.) *Chichester Deans. Continuity, Commitment and Change at Chichester Cathedral, 1902–2006* (Chichester: University of Chichester), pp. 63–71, at p. 66.

⁵⁷W. Hussey (1949) 'A churchman discusses art in the Church', *The Studio* 138, pp. 80–81, 95.

⁵⁸W. Hussey (1978) 'The arts and the Church', *English Church Music*, pp. 7–10. The address was given to the Diocesan Synod in March 1977.

she worked. 'Art of high standard can and should be offered by mankind and in the offering symbolize all that should be offered by mankind.' Every Christian should be offering their whole endeavour to God, in whichever occupation, and the artist's work could be 'a symbol of man's life focussed in an act of worship in church'.⁵⁹

Although it is unclear how familiar he was with their work, Hussey had also adopted the prevailing view amongst artists and critics of the recent history of Christian art. In 1949, he thought, the typical piece of work in an English church was 'either a weak and sentimental essay in the most over-ripe Raffaelesque tradition, or occasionally a self-conscious straining after a modernesque style, while rarely does it suggest its subject with any force or vitality'. Though devotionally useful this work might be, it could not be the standard, and there was a broader cultural and historical problem with which to contend. In earlier ages, with a strong tradition of Christian art in a Christian culture, even a second-rate artist would produce adequate work, but now this unconscious reflection of the tradition could not be relied upon. 'When the tradition is largely lost and civilization is in a state of transition, it is among the finest and most profound artists that the Church should seek help'.⁶⁰

There were wider reasons for engaging with artists working in contemporary styles. The art of the past was to be studied constantly, and from it could inspiration and enrichment of worship be drawn. But the Church in every age needed the artist 'to set forth her truth [and] to give the fruit of their contemporary meditation on those truths.' There could be no guarantee that the result would be great art—only time could prove that—but 'the art of today cannot imitate the great art of the past...the more it tries to imitate, the less will it show real understanding'. The contemporary artist 'has lost the religious habit in which many of the earlier generations grew up...he will not get back to it by himself, unasked and unsought. The Church must go after him'.⁶¹

That pursuit would involve 'patience and sympathy, tact and perseverance'.⁶² What was Hussey's view of the relationship between patron and artist? As the next two chapters will show, his early ventures were marked

⁵⁹ Hussey, 'The arts and the Church', pp. 7–8.

⁶⁰ Hussey, 'A churchman discusses', p. 80.

⁶¹ Hussey, 'The arts and the Church', pp. 8–9.

⁶² Hussey, 'The arts and the Church', p. 9.

by a mixture of daring—a simple inability to know his place as a provincial parish priest—and a certain naivety as to the ways in which artists and composers were accustomed to working. In retirement, Hussey wrote on the subject of patronage, but this view was, in fact, fairly well formed in Hussey's mind by 1947. Hussey was fond of recalling a meal in London, after one of the early performances of Britten's opera *Peter Grimes* in June 1945. Around the table were Henry Moore, Graham Sutherland (at the time working on his Crucifixion for Northampton) and the critic Eric Newton and his wife: patron, artist and critic all together. Sutherland remarked that of the three, the patron was the key, because without him, no project would begin.⁶³ This led Hussey to the thought that 'the artist needs to feel that he has a role in society and is wanted.'⁶⁴ A rather obvious point, perhaps, but (as we shall see) Hussey's approach to patronage was a highly personal one, based very often on a friendship with those he commissioned. By 1945, Hussey was, in fact, already working in just this way; Sutherland's words seem to have acted as a confirmation.

'Very often', Hussey recalled, 'a commission, if [the artist] feels it is for something he could and would like to do, provides a challenge. The requirements and limitations within which he must work offer a stimulus rather than a restriction to his creative ability.'⁶⁵ As we shall see, this was indeed the case, in Britten's response to the curiosity that was Christopher Smart's text, or Graham Sutherland's treatment of the Crucifixion. Here visible is the influence of Hans Feibusch, whose book *Mural Painting* was published in 1946 and which Hussey knew. 'The artist on his side, it will be found, is always glad to have the collaboration of the patron', wrote Feibusch. 'He does not want to be offered a vacuum to fill as he pleases, he likes to be given the material; but he must be permitted to use it in his own way.'⁶⁶ Chapter 4 will show Hussey using Feibusch's work as an authority.

⁶³Hussey, *Patron of Art*, p. 53.

⁶⁴Hussey, 'Patronage', the foreword to the catalogue for the exhibition 'The Walter Hussey Art Collection', Northampton Art Gallery, 1978, at Pallant House Gallery Archives, Dean Walter Hussey file.

⁶⁵Hussey, 'Patronage'.

⁶⁶Feibusch, *Mural Painting*, p. 92.

What was required of the patron, Hussey asked? ‘He must feel passionately that art is important. He must be willing to seek the best advice—always most readily given, in my experience.’⁶⁷ The whole of this book will show that Hussey was certainly passionate about the importance of the arts. Hussey was also an assiduous seeker of advice, and that advice seems to have been very readily given as artists and critics alike recognised that they had on their hands a highly unusual clergyman acting at a propitious time. Hussey repeatedly used the advice of the expert as a lever with which to move those within his churches who had to be moved in order to make a scheme a reality. This was partly due to his own reticence in developing a theology of art of his own: others were simply better at saying what needed to be said. Hussey’s deference to experts must be seen alongside his fascination with the establishment, which was formed early. His early diaries note in detail early brushes with the aristocracy as they took tea with John Rowden Hussey in the vicarage at Northampton, or the occasion on which he sat directly behind Winston Churchill at an Oxford Union debate.⁶⁸ His autograph book, begun as a schoolboy, contains autographs from prime ministers, members of the aristocracy, numerous bishops and archbishops, as well as what was at this stage a small number of artistic figures: George Bernard Shaw, Richard Strauss, Gustav Holst and John Masefield among them.⁶⁹ One reviewer of *Patron of Art* noted the inclusion of ‘a great many letters from notable people, many of them saying what a splendid fellow Walter Hussey is. Their reproduction is probably the only lapse of taste in his career.’⁷⁰

What else did the patron owe the artist, in Hussey’s view? ‘He must try to understand the artist’s point of view, always expressing his thought honestly, but at the same time willing to learn and to trust the artist.’⁷¹ As we shall see, Hussey was by and large successful in this although not always, as in the case of Lennox Berkeley (see Chap. 4). Here again, he was perhaps influenced by Hans Feibusch. Contemporary artists should

⁶⁷Hussey, ‘Patronage’.

⁶⁸Diary entries of 6 October 1928 and 1 March 1928, at MS Hussey 32.

⁶⁹MS Hussey 53.

⁷⁰Nicholas Bagnall review of *Patron of Art* in the *Sunday Telegraph*, 24 March 1985: cutting at MS Hussey 281.

⁷¹Hussey, ‘Patronage’.

not even attempt religious work, Feibusch thought, ‘unless you feel that you move naturally and gladly in the world out of which they come’. Once certain of this, however, the artist should ‘carry it out as vigorously as you can and without further compromise’. It was up to the church to give the artist the freedom to act on that conviction.⁷²

Was it necessary that the artist himself be a Christian believer? (Hussey’s commissionees were all male). The logical conclusion of Hussey’s view of the work of art itself—that the making of art was intrinsically religious, an offering to God and a participation in His creative work—suggested not. Any suggestion of a ‘heresy hunt’ would be counter-productive. What was required from the artist was not belief, but ‘real sympathy with the work [and] an ability and willingness to understand from the inside.’⁷³ As we shall see, not all those who saw the results thought them a complete success.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND AS PATRON IN THE 1930s

As we have seen, some in the Church of England had been developing a renewed theology of the arts in the 1920s. Was this intellectual backing for Hussey’s idea accompanied with practical examples to follow? In this, the story is different for each of the arts. Martin Thomas has argued that the inter-war period saw English church music composition moving in a more conservative direction: stylistically derivative and excessively utilitarian.⁷⁴ Despite this, new church music was being written by established composers for use in the Church, some (although by no means all) of it music of distinction and originality, from figures such as Gustav Holst and Vaughan Williams, and by lesser figures such as Edward Bairstow, W. H. Harris and Harold Darke. Despite some signs of decline, there were still a multitude of choral festivals at national and local level. In the School of English Church Music (founded in 1928), there was a body charged with the maintenance and fostering of the tradition. *English Church Music*, the SECM’s journal from 1931, provided a channel in

⁷²Feibusch, *Mural Painting*, p. 91.

⁷³Hussey, ‘A churchman discusses’, p. 95.

⁷⁴M. Thomas (2015) *English cathedral music and liturgy in the twentieth century* (Farnham: Ashgate), pp. 21–63.

which the genre could be documented and discussed, and new church music was also taken seriously in the musical press more widely.⁷⁵

A common view amongst the group of artists and critics in sympathy with Hussey's project was that religious art was in a sorry state in the late 1930s. It was certainly in a rather weaker position than was the case for music. Artists were not accustomed to working for the church in the way that many contemporary composers were, but churches did routinely acquire new furnishings and decoration. Hussey also had some examples of church commissioning of work from prominent artists to fire his imagination, although it is not clear how far he knew them. One was the fourteen carved panels of the Stations of the Cross by Eric Gill, executed between 1913 and 1918 for the chief Roman Catholic church in the land, Westminster Cathedral.⁷⁶ George Bell, after moving from Canterbury to be bishop of Chichester in 1929, had commissioned a series of works of art in new churches between 1938 and 1941: E.W. Tristram in Eastbourne; Hans Feibusch in Brighton; Augustus Lunn in Hove. In 1941, he had also intervened on the side of the artist in a dispute over the mural paintings by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell in the country church of Berwick.⁷⁷ In 1943, Hussey had a theological framework in which to work, and some early examples from which to learn.

A PARTIAL VISION

Hussey occupies a uniquely important place in the recent history of music and visual art made for the Church of England. However, there is at least one more art form in which great hopes were invested by Anglicans in this period: religious drama. As with the visual arts, the medieval church had been a major player in public dramatic performance, in the shape of the mystery plays. As with the visual arts, the Reformation had cut through this traditional connection, and all but banished dramatic performance from within the Church. As with the visual arts, there were those in the Church of England who grasped this

⁷⁵On the existence of a church music 'Establishment', see I. Jones and P. Webster (2006) 'Anglican "Establishment" reactions to "pop" church music in England, 1956–c.1990', *Studies in Church History* 42, pp. 429–441.

⁷⁶F. MacCarthy (1989) *Eric Gill* (London: Faber), pp. 124–126.

⁷⁷R.C.D. Jasper (1967) *George Bell. Bishop of Chichester* (London: OUP), p. 129; F. Spalding (1999) *Duncan Grant* (London: Chatto and Windus), pp. 380–385.

story of an older tradition lost, and saw both an opportunity and a need to recreate that connection. George Bell's first moves in artistic patronage as Dean of Canterbury were new religious plays commissioned for the cathedral, beginning with *The Coming of Christ* by John Masefield, first performed in 1928.⁷⁸ 'On that day', thought Bell, 'history was made...the Poet and the Artist together re-entered the Church.'⁷⁹ The enterprise that Bell began at Canterbury was then to produce plays from Charles Williams, Christopher Fry, Dorothy L. Sayers and (most famously) T.S. Eliot: his *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935).⁸⁰ The period after 1945 saw a remarkable flowering of local dramatic activity in churches, fostered by the Religious Drama Society.⁸¹ Bell, as Hussey's bishop, stayed in close touch with this effort. Given all this, it would have been a natural companion piece to Hussey's interest in music and the visual arts to have tried similarly to foster the religious drama.

Hussey was not uninterested in the theatre; quite the reverse. The diaries of his youth recount trips to London theatres with his father, along with regular encounters with visiting players at the New Theatre in Northampton as John Rowden invited them to tea. 'The gay geniality of this set quite dazzles me', he wrote at the age of nineteen, '& for about a day makes me think seriously of some work connected with such a life (Company Manager, or the like.)'⁸² Yet, despite having the opportunity and (in Chichester) the resources, Hussey seems not to have engaged with religious drama to anything like the same extent. At Northampton, there were offers of help. In 1949, Hussey was approached by Alexander Brent-Smith about a possible performance of a play on St Paul with musical interludes.⁸³ While now not remembered as a particularly significant composer, Brent-Smith was no ingenue, having

⁷⁸P. Webster (2012) 'George Bell, John Masefield and *The Coming of Christ*: context and significance' in A. Chandler (ed.) *The Church and Humanity. The life and work of George Bell, 1883–1958* (Farnham: Ashgate), pp. 47–57.

⁷⁹Webster 'George Bell, John Masefield and *The Coming of Christ*', p. 47.

⁸⁰K. Pickering (1985) *Drama in the cathedral. The Canterbury Festival plays 1928–1948* (Worthing: Churchman).

⁸¹Pickering, *Drama in the Cathedral*, *passim*.

⁸²Diary entries of 2 January 1929 and 30 September 1928, at MS Hussey 32.

⁸³Alexander Brent-Smith to WH, 10 November 1949, at MS Hussey 343.

been director of music at Lancing College in Sussex as well as a prolific author.⁸⁴ However, the idea seems to have progressed no further. A little later, Hussey was put in touch with Hugh Ross Williamson, the priest and dramatist, but appears not to have pursued any collaboration.⁸⁵

A more significant figure altogether was Ronald Duncan, who had been librettist to Benjamin Britten, most notably for the opera *The Rape of Lucretia* (1946).⁸⁶ Duncan's play *Our Lady's Tumbler* had been written for the Festival of Britain in 1951, and performed at Salisbury Cathedral. The music was by Arthur Oldham, another Britten connection, with designs by Cecil Beaton.⁸⁷ In this case, Hussey evidently expressed some interest in a performance at Northampton with the original cast, such that Duncan sent him a copy of the play, but this too was to come to nothing. Eric Crozier, another major figure in the Britten circle, had in 1945 sent Hussey an unspecified play by the French Catholic playwright Henri Ghéon. Hussey evidently liked the play, but not sufficiently to pursue a performance at Northampton.⁸⁸

There was, however, one modern writer of religious plays that Hussey did attempt to commission. Christopher Fry was, in 1953, at the height of his popularity, with the success in the West End of plays including *The Lady's Not for Burning* and *Venus Observed*. Fry's vision had been a religious one from the first: a revival of religious verse drama, which owed much to T.S. Eliot. George Bell had encouraged Fry as a young playwright living in Sussex in the 1930s. It was through Bell that Fry had met Martin Browne, animating force of the Religious Drama Society, which was to commission his *A Sleep of Prisoners* (1951).⁸⁹

⁸⁴Maggie Humphreys and Robert Evans (1997) *Dictionary of Composers for the Church in Great Britain and Ireland* (London: Mansell), p. 41.

⁸⁵Sylvia Coleridge to WH, 1 January 1952, at MS Hussey 354.

⁸⁶H. Carpenter (1992) *Benjamin Britten. A biography* (London: Faber), pp. 233, 242. Although by 1950 Duncan had fallen out of favour with Britten, the composer still wrote in relation to the collaboration with Oldham: Britten to Duncan, 3 February 1950, in D. Mitchell, P. Reed and M. Cooke, eds. (2004) *Letters from a Life. Selected Letters of Benjamin Britten: volume 3, 1946–1951* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), pp. 577–578.

⁸⁷Duncan to WH, 13 December 1950, and undated, both at MS Hussey 313.

⁸⁸Crozier to WH, 23 April 1945, at MS Hussey 403.

⁸⁹Jasper, *Bell*, p. 126. On Fry's play *Thor, With Angels*, written for Canterbury Cathedral, see Kenneth W. Pickering (1985) *Drama in the Cathedral. The Canterbury Festival Plays, 1928–1948* (Worthing: Churchman), pp. 288–300.

Once Hussey had moved to Chichester, he and Fry were to become very well acquainted, as Fry moved to the nearby village of East Dean. Fry was one of the contributors to the Chichester 900 volume of essays for the cathedral's ninth centenary, and was also to give a tribute to Hussey's work at the latter's retirement dinner in Chichester in 1977.⁹⁰ However, it was in 1953, when Hussey was still at Northampton that he approached Fry to write a play for St Matthew's. Fry expressed his longstanding admiration for Hussey's work, and hoped to write for Northampton at a later date.⁹¹ However, Fry never did return to the idea, and Hussey did not press it again.

When set against the tenacity with which Hussey pursued those he most wanted to commission, the evidence of these several abortive contacts suggests strongly that, although by the early 1950s, Hussey had noted the growing interest in religious drama, it was not a central part of his vision. Perhaps the key to understanding this apparent contradiction is to be found in Hussey's own art collection, which contains a small group of theatre designs. One of these was Hussey's first purchase, of a costume design for Romeo from a 1932 Oxford University Dramatic Society production of *Romeo and Juliet*.⁹² The other three are older still, being designs by the Russians Leon Bakst (d.1924) and Aleksandr Benua (d.1960), both associated with Diaghilev and the Ballets Russes. Among Hussey's papers is a small watercolour, possibly by Hussey himself, of the three kings of the Christmas narrative, on which are added notes on the fabrics out of which their costumes might be made, presumably for a nativity play.⁹³ It would seem that Hussey was interested in the theatre for how it *looked*, rather than for the words it used and the stories it had to tell. His was a visual and a musical imagination; and where it was verbal, the commissions were of poetry for recitation, not for dramatic performance. George Bell encouraged the arts as an outgrowth of his theology, and as such, his vision encompassed all the arts. In contrast, Hussey was led by his aesthetic sense, and only secondarily attempted to add theological scaffolding around his work. As such, the emerging revival in religious drama is missing from his patronage because it simply

⁹⁰Fry to the Mayor of Chichester, 29 June 1977, at MS Hussey 108.

⁹¹Fry to WH, 27 January 1953, at MS Hussey 321.

⁹²Coke and Colyer, *The Fine Art Collections*, p. 5.

⁹³The painting is at MS Hussey 52.

did not excite him in the same way as did contemporary music and visual art.

Another of the religious arts in which Hussey had limited interest was architecture.⁹⁴ Granted, by the time Hussey retired, the Church of England was more likely to be decommissioning redundant churches than building new ones. However, there were significant new buildings in modern styles during Hussey's period, such as those by N.F. Cachemaille-Day in the diocese of Manchester in the 1930s, or the crop of new Roman Catholic buildings between the mid-1950s and the 1970s.⁹⁵ Even if these examples were somewhat outside Hussey's usual circles of contacts, there were Anglicans closer to him to whom architecture was a concern. George Bell had invited Cachemaille-Day to a conference on the 'Church and the Artist' at Chichester in 1944, along with Edward Maufe, architect of the new Guildford Cathedral and the Bishop Hannington Memorial Church in Hove (1938–1939), within Bell's diocese.⁹⁶ Although Maufe's Guildford was scarcely in a modernist style to which much objection could be taken, Basil Spence's rather more challenging Coventry Cathedral brought the question of the legitimate architectural style for a church building to the forefront of debate. This debate broadened in the 1960s to take in the most fundamental questions of the purpose of a building made for worship.⁹⁷

As an incumbent of existing buildings at Northampton and Chichester, clearly Hussey was not in a position to commission architects as he could artists and composers, beyond the more routine work of maintenance that was required. Hussey seems to have approached Basil Spence about the rebuilding of the church hall in 1955, at what turned

⁹⁴A point made by A. Doig (1996) 'Architecture and performance: Dean Walter Hussey and the arts' *Theology* 99: 787, 16–21.

⁹⁵M. Bullen (1997) 'Cachemaille-Day's Manchester Churches' in Chris Ford, Michael Powell & Terry Wyke (eds.) *The Church in Cottonopolis. Essays to mark the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Manchester* (Manchester: Lancs & Cheshire Antiq. Soc.), pp. 144–174; R. Proctor (2014) *Building the Modern Church. Roman Catholic church architecture in Britain, 1955 to 1975* (Farnham: Ashgate).

⁹⁶Cachemaille-Day to George Bell, 17 November 1944, at LPL Bell Papers, vol. 151, f. 266; Jasper, *George Bell*, p. 130.

⁹⁷See, for instance, the essays in G. Cope, ed. (1962) *Making the building serve the liturgy* (London: Mowbray), and P. Hammond, ed. (1962) *Towards a church architecture* (London: Architectural Press).

out to be only weeks before his appointment to Chichester.⁹⁸ Shortly after, it was to Spence that Hussey turned for help with the internal masonry at Chichester (which is detailed in Chap. 5). That said, despite the very close theological parallels between contemporary debates about the visual arts and those on architecture, Hussey seems to have engaged little with them. His voluminous collections of cuttings from newspapers and other periodicals contain little on architecture, and he seems rarely to have made the kind of pilgrimage to a new church as he would habitually do to a gallery, theatre or concert hall. His interest in Coventry seems to have been largely confined to the artworks within the building, rather than with the building itself, being kept in touch by Graham Sutherland with the progress of his massive tapestry.⁹⁹ Whether due to lack of opportunity, or a simple lack of interest, modern church architecture was as much a lacuna in Hussey's thinking as was religious drama.

Within Hussey's interest in the visual arts, there were also some striking blind spots. Viewed in retrospect, one of the most significant figures in religious art in the period was Stanley Spencer, but with only the slightest connection with places of worship. The remarkable Sandham Memorial chapel at Burghclere must be unique among churches in the order in which it was conceived, being a building commissioned to house the art, rather than the other way around. Spencer's patrons, John Louis and Mary Behrend, were so taken with sketches they saw in 1923 that they committed to build a chapel to house them. Although it was consecrated for Anglican use, it remained always a private family chapel, and was only ever used occasionally for public worship.¹⁰⁰ Spencer was born in 1891, but not until the 1950s was he in consideration for a major ecclesiastical commission, for Llandaff Cathedral.¹⁰¹ (The commission went to Jacob Epstein.)

⁹⁸Basil Spence to WH, 21 January 1955, at MS Hussey 433. Nothing came of the scheme, until it was revived in 1959 with a different architect. Harrison, *St Matthew's*, p. 125.

⁹⁹See many of the letters at MS Hussey 345.

¹⁰⁰A. Bradley (2014) 'The reluctant Maecenases: John Louis and Mary Behrend' in A. Bradley and H. Watson (eds.) *Stanley Spencer. Heaven in a hell of war* (Chichester: Pallant House Gallery), pp. 22–23.

¹⁰¹M. Collis (1962) *Stanley Spencer. A biography* (London: Harvill), p. 233.

Why the churches did not engage more with Spencer is a matter for conjecture. Certainly, Spencer's is an idiosyncratic vision, of which some may have been wary. Episodes such as the abortive commission for the chapel of Campion Hall in Oxford may not have helped; Spencer was reported to have declared to the Jesuit Martin D'Arcy that 'in my painting I owe nothing to God and everything to the Devil.'¹⁰² Hussey's bequest of books to Pallant House contained a single item on Spencer, the 1947 volume by Eric Newton in the Penguin Modern Painters series; if Hussey ever saw Spencer's work exhibited, he did not keep a catalogue. There was one moment of contact: Hussey invited Spencer to give a talk at Chichester in 1956, which Spencer declined.¹⁰³ For Hussey, it may have been that Spencer was almost a generation older than those he commissioned in the 1940s. Perhaps the key was in the different circles in which the two moved. Mary Behrend was associated with Benjamin Britten as well as Spencer, and wrote twice to congratulate Hussey, one patron to another, for the Rubbra and Sutherland commissions.¹⁰⁴ But Hussey respected the opinion of Kenneth Clark a great deal (on which see Chap. 5), and Clark seems to have had little time for Spencer. George Behrend, Mary's son, was of the opinion that Clark 'disliked Spencer and everyone to do with him'.¹⁰⁵ Although Behrend was an unreliable witness, it nonetheless seems unlikely that Clark would have advised Hussey to look to Spencer. Newton, another of Hussey's early advisers, thought highly of Spencer, but if Newton said as much to Hussey, the advice was not taken.¹⁰⁶

The other major gap in Hussey's career was in relation to the circle associated with Eric Gill. Works such as the Stations of the Cross for Westminster Cathedral had made Gill one of the most prominent religious artists of the inter-war period and, although Gill himself had died in 1940, Hussey could have called upon a number of friends, associates and former apprentices. One such was David Jones, painter, poet and (like Gill) a convinced Roman Catholic. Although there were two works

¹⁰² Collis, *Stanley Spencer*, p. 158.

¹⁰³ Spencer to WH, 14 November 1956, at MS Hussey 434.

¹⁰⁴ Mary Behrend to WH, 24 September 1944, at MS Hussey 342; Mary Behrend to WH, 13 November 1946, at MS Hussey 346.

¹⁰⁵ Bradley, 'John Louis and Mary Behrend', p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ For Newton's view of Spencer, see E. Newton and W. Neil (1966) *The Christian Faith in Art* (London: Thames & Hudson), pp. 275–279.

by Jones in Hussey's private collection at his death, he seems to have engaged little with Jones' work for possible commissioning.¹⁰⁷ The single commission with a Gill association was from Denis Tegetmeier, Gill's son-in-law, who had been a member of the community at Ditchling in Sussex, and married Petra Gill after she had broken off an engagement to David Jones. In 1949, Tegetmeier designed the inscription over the place where the ashes of Hussey's parents lay in the Lady Chapel of St Matthew's.¹⁰⁸ After reaching Chichester, Hussey seems to have become well acquainted with John Skelton, Gill's nephew and (briefly) his apprentice, who was based in Burgess Hill, some forty miles east of Chichester. Skelton contributed a simple wooden cross to the refurbished Sailors' Chapel in the cathedral in 1956, and also an essay on Gill's association with Chichester to the Chichester 900 collection.¹⁰⁹ The connection between the two seems to have been warm; Skelton's retirement gift to Hussey, a mark of their artistic understanding, was a portrait of David Jones.¹¹⁰ However, Skelton's major commission for Chichester, the font, was a project of Robert Holtby, Hussey's successor. Why Hussey seems not to have engaged with the Gill circle as commissionees must remain a matter of speculation. It would have been curious if Hussey should have been wary of the Roman Catholicism with which Gill and Jones were both publicly associated, since he was so accommodating of other artists without any Christian allegiance at all. It may simply have been a matter of taste.

¹⁰⁷The two works were 'Puma' (1930), and 'Laetare – Sunday Thrush' (1948). Pallant House Gallery, *The Fine Art Collections*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁸Tegetmeier to WH, 7 February 1947, at MS Hussey 349.

¹⁰⁹M. Hobbs (1994) *Chichester Cathedral. An historical survey* (Chichester: Phillimore) pp. 269–270; Skelton (1975) 'Eric Gill in Chichester' in W. Hussey (ed.) *Chichester 900* (Chichester: Chichester Cathedral), pp. 48–52.

¹¹⁰Skelton to WH, 25 July 1977, at MS Hussey 108.

HUSSEY'S CHARACTER

As we saw earlier in this chapter, Tom Devonshire Jones noted the overarching significance of the arts in Hussey's view of the world. Hussey's life was characterised by a search for aesthetic perfection, and 'his life style's solitariness and incompleteness were wrapped up in this search'.¹¹¹

Was Hussey a solitary man, as Devonshire Jones suggested? Hussey himself appears in his papers often only obliquely; a product of his habit of retaining only those letters he received, and not copies of those he sent. Glimpses of his character are therefore relatively few, and often provided by others. Lancelot Mason, a clerical colleague at Chichester, wrote of Hussey as a brilliant mimic and raconteur, a retailer of tales of opera singers and conductors, a 'delightful colleague and companion'.¹¹² His secretary during the later years at Chichester, Hilary Bryan-Brown, similarly remembered one who was more than ready to laugh at the odder aspects of life in a cathedral city, and to be distracted from the dictation of letters in order to recall stories of people he had met and amusing situations in which he had found himself. At Chichester, he seems to have been ready to talk to anyone from around the cathedral community about some personal difficulty, and was ready both to give advice and to take up a cause with great tenacity.¹¹³ Devonshire Jones also noted a suavity that allowed him to meet Kenneth Clark on something like equal terms.¹¹⁴ The correspondence with the artists and musicians with whom he was comfortable shows many signs of genuine affection, including from their spouses.

Bryan-Brown recorded difficulties as well as strengths. One was Hussey's shyness; although he could be charming with those he knew, there was considerable effort required in the meeting of new people (the phrase is 'private agonies'). A close friend in the later years at Chichester and in retirement described him as both diffident and shy, but charming once one was known. The same friend remembered Hussey as

¹¹¹T. Devonshire Jones (2007) 'The legacy: the public figure' in P. Foster (ed.) *Chichester Deans. Continuity, Commitment and Change at Chichester Cathedral, 1902–2006* (Chichester: University of Chichester), pp. 63–71, at p. 66.

¹¹²L. Mason (2007) 'Walter Hussey' in P. Foster (ed.), *Chichester Deans*, pp. 143–144.

¹¹³Bryan-Brown, 'Hussey at the Deanery', pp. 72–77; interview with James Simpson-Manser.

¹¹⁴Devonshire Jones, 'The legacy', p. 68.

exceptionally determined once set on a course of action, and irascible when he was frustrated.¹¹⁵ This manifested itself both in private and in public, such as if an unsuspecting pedestrian should obstruct the way as Bryan-Brown drove the Dean to the railway station in haste to catch a train to London.¹¹⁶

As the introduction made clear, this is not a work of biography proper, but a study of a professional life examined in its longitude: a quite different thing. There is, however, a further aspect of the story, which is nowhere explicit in the papers, but may be plainly read off from them: Hussey's own sexuality. In recent years, sexuality has assumed such a prominent role in the projection of personal identity that not to engage with it in Hussey's case would now seem as in some way an abdication of responsibility. This is perhaps particularly the case given the prominence that matters of sexuality have since assumed in public discussion of the Anglican church.

Hussey's own homosexuality presents the historian with a difficulty, in that the documentary evidence for it is thin, although those who remember him are in no doubt of it. And one might of course expect this, since most of Hussey's life was lived in a sexual monoculture, at least in the public sphere. In 1955, when Hussey arrived in Chichester, homosexual practice was contrary to the moral teaching of the church. If there were some voices within the churches who argued for a greater understanding of the plight of the homosexual man, it was yet couched in terms of help, care, indeed treatment and cure. And of course, until the passing of the Sexual Offences Act 1967, when Hussey was nearing 60, to be an active gay man was to risk prosecution and prison. In this context, it is hardly surprising that the Hussey Papers contain little direct evidence of Hussey's sexual identity.

That said, Hussey's diaries as a young man at Oxford and Cuddesdon are those of a young man quite clear in his own identity, but unsure how best to reconcile it with his vocation to the priesthood.¹¹⁷ The diaries are patchy in their coverage, but describe in detail an intense infatuation with a near contemporary in Oxford, by whom the affection was

¹¹⁵ Interview with James Simpson-Manser.

¹¹⁶ Bryan-Brown, 'Hussey at the Deanery', pp. 72, 74.

¹¹⁷ See, for instance, the entry for 21 November 1931, at MS Hussey 33.

not returned, and who died tragically not long afterwards.¹¹⁸ There is in the diaries a sense in which Hussey's turn towards ordination was also a renunciation of this particular side of him: a choosing of the certainties of Christ over the agonies of unrequited love. In later years, as was typical, the question of why Hussey never married was spoken of (insofar as it was mentioned at all) with the curious mixture of coyness and jocularity which surrounded such open secrets. George Bell made enquiries about the subject amongst clergy in Northampton whilst considering appointing Hussey as dean, and the answer from John Grimes, arch-deacon of Northampton, was typical. Hussey had not avoided marriage because he disliked women; the real reason, Grimes thought, was that, since Hussey had lived very near to his parents, he simply did not feel the need. When Grimes teased him about it, Hussey had always replied that he kept an open mind on the matter.¹¹⁹ Whether this was naivety or reticence on Grimes' part, it fits the pattern of other such exchanges.

That Hussey was indeed homosexual comes into clearer view after 1967. Hilary Bryan-Brown recorded that he would habitually travel to London from Chichester at least once a week, mostly to visit exhibitions and buy and sell pieces for his own collection, but also hear a concert or see a play, and see his friends.¹²⁰ The small body of personal correspondence from the last years in Chichester and his early retirement in London suggests that many of those friends in London were gay men. Hussey had helped in several ways—lent money, offered to stand as guarantor—and in turn, his correspondents were frank about the new and unfamiliar task of building gay relationships in the open: a frankness that it would be hard to imagine with a heterosexual clergyman of Hussey's generation. After retirement, Hussey was on close social terms with activists in Gay Lobby, part of the Campaign for Homosexual Equality that lobbied parliamentarians.¹²¹

Even after 1967, such social contacts would have been difficult to maintain in the goldfish bowl of Chichester, and so Hussey needed to go elsewhere to find companionship with those who understood this part

¹¹⁸ See, for instance, the entry for 9 August 1932, at MS Hussey 34, and those preceding it.

¹¹⁹ Grimes to Bell, 29 January 1955, at WSRO Episcopal Records, Acc. 11268, Box 4, Hussey file.

¹²⁰ Bryan-Brown, 'Hussey at the Deanery', p. 76.

¹²¹ 'Richard' to WH, 14 September 1979, at MS Hussey 449.

of him. James Simpson-Manser recalled that Hussey was able to relax in the company of gay men, which explained the frequency of his visits to London. However, Hussey's sexuality was also an open secret within the cathedral: well-known but seldom mentioned. Neither Bryan-Brown nor James Simpson-Manser, probably the two people to whom Hussey was closest, remember any 'significant other': no echoes in Hussey's recollection of earlier relationships of particular significance. However, David Burton Evans recalled that Hussey's particular interest in the company of younger men was well known, to the point of becoming the stuff of ribald humour among the gentlemen of the choir. Bryan-Brown's suspicion was that by the early 1970s, there was little physical element left in this—it had become a spectator sport—but the regular visits to the Deanery of various younger men from outside the city was noted, and at least one member of the cathedral congregation thought the dean ought to be more careful.¹²²

This study is not concerned with establishing the pattern of Hussey's sexual life; but the fact of his homosexuality is significant in relation to the working relationships and subsequent friendships he was to form. One commentator on Hussey, albeit only briefly, has drawn a parallel between Hussey and the character of Gustav von Aschenbach in Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Hussey certainly knew Venice, having visited the city more than once, in the company of Graham Sutherland.¹²³ The range of Hussey's reading was not wide, and so it is hard to show that he himself knew Mann's novella. However, Hussey can hardly have avoided making some identification between Aschenbach and his own situation once Britten had created his own opera *Death in Venice*; an artistic 'coming out' that confirmed the open secret of his own sexuality. Aschenbach is caught between the desiccated contemplation of art, and the drive towards orgiastic abandon represented by the youth Tadzio, beautiful yet untouchable. Hussey too was caught between Apollonian devotion to the arts in all their forms, and the denial of the fullest expression of his own sexuality which had been unacceptable in law for almost all his life, and remained so in the discipline of his own church. Such a self-identification cannot be established from the sources, but Hussey's own emotional constitution would have made it an attractive one.

¹²²Interview with Hilary Bryan-Brown; interview with David Burton Evans; interview with James Simpson-Manser.

¹²³*Daily Express*, 17 May 1957: cutting at MS Hussey 347.

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Church and Patronage in 20th Century Britain

Walter Hussey and the Arts

Webster, P.

2017, XII, 256 p. 19 illus., 7 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-137-36909-3

A product of Palgrave Macmillan UK