

HOORAY FOR ENTHUSIASM



Polly Meynell is a young ecclesiastical designer whose work is steadily gaining recognition. Her work can be seen in a growing number of our churches. In this short article her training and current work is considered.

Polly gained her degree in textile design from Brunell University in 1996 where her final year dissertation was

on silk and ecclesiastical wear and it was that study that led her into ecclesiastical work. She had found the long and intricate history of English embroidery fascinating and felt that the wealth of embroidered artefacts still surviving today within the church is one of the country's national treasures. It was this magnificent work that inspired her to set up a business so that she could try and maintain and further this tradition.

From her studio in Westhampnett near Chichester she works designing and making all manner of items for church interior where fabric is concerned. All of her work is hand designed and constructed using a range of fabrics from around the world. She says "My aim is to produce work which will combine contemporary design with traditional techniques and influences in order to be in harmony with the building in which it is to be used." Every item is specially made for the client and only after there have been consultations and site meetings to make sure that the choice of materials, colour co-ordinate completely with the building does she proceed with the design.

Shortly after she graduated Polly was extremely fortunate to be commissioned to make a cope, mitre and stole for the Bishop of London Richard Chartres to celebrate the tercentenary of the reconsecration of the choir in St Paul's Cathedral. The set, sponsored by the Drapers Company was in gold damask with red silk velvet trimmings and golden embroidery. The Bishop played a large part in the

design as he had firm ideas about what he wished to adorn at the cope. Depicted on the orphreys are Mandel Crichton, a former Bishop of London, and John Donne, in his winding sheet, (both statues that face one another in the Cathedral) and both bearded, like the current Bishop. Polly managed to have the last word on the hood design and it shows a silhouette of St Pauls Dome with flames to represent both the Great Fire and the Blitz. The project took a little over ten months from conception to completion and at the time she and her husband were living in a tiny one bedroomed flat in the Oval London. The living room served both as studio and office and the cope stood in a corner of the room trying to be inconspicuous when the couple invited friends in for dinner. When the commission was finally completed they rather missed having the cope standing above them!

During her time in London Polly was lucky enough to work for Watts and Company drawing up for them designs for a number of large projects. Having the chance to work in their premises in Westminster surrounded by ecclesiastical vestment history, stretching back over many generations, gave her a wonderful grounding for her own work and she is pleased to be able to maintain links with the company to this day.



Through her association with the Drapers Company, she has been sponsored by the Princes Youth Business Trust. Their loan enabled her to cover many of the start up costs of her practice which would otherwise have required crippling bank loans. One of her more recent projects has been to provide a cope for the Vicar of Burpham, a parish near Arundel, which was required within two weeks and this she found particularly exciting. Looking over her work table and

surrounded by fabric samples and sketches she says that "I think people find ecclesiastical design an unlikely field for a young designer, but for me it seemed an obvious choice. There are few design careers nowadays that can offer such a vast wealth of history from which to draw inspiration or the opportunity to use fabrics of such quality in some of the most outstanding buildings in the country. To be part of a tradition of stature in British textile history is truly a privileged position."

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