

8th November 2013

Dear Parishioners and friends,

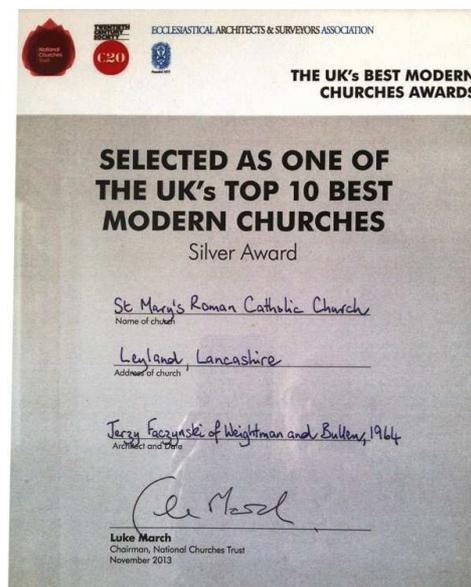
I thought I ought to let you have a personal impression of what happened on Thursday 7th November from 1.30 to 5.30pm at Lambeth Palace as it concerns directly our parish.

Two members of the Parish and one from the architect's practice that had been behind the design of our Church were invited to Lambeth Palace.



Edward Almond, Fr. Jonathan and Peter Bullen just before the award ceremony after lunch in Lambeth Palace

We were in the top three of the 200 entrants in a competition to discover which the best modern Churches in the UK were. In the event I attended as Parish Priest of St. Mary's Leyland, Edward Almond born and bred in Leyland as the person looking after the Golden Jubilee celebrations of our Church in 2014, and Peter Bullen, son of the Mr. Bullen of Weightman and Bullen, the Liverpool architects (whose practice still exists) which had been behind our Church building which was opened on 4 April 1964.



We won the silver award, second best in the eyes of the judges! I felt immensely proud and moved by it all.



Presentation by Prince Nicholas von Preussen with Fr. Jonathan, Edward Almond and Peter Bullen

It was a very blessed experience, which had so many positive and helpful aspects in an atmosphere of trusting love and support. Each day you learn something new. I did a lot of learning that day. This thanks to the courtesy and kindness of our Anglican friends who look after Lambeth Palace, the London home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. But also the National Church's Trust with the Ecclesiastical Architects and Surveyors Association, and the 20th Century Society did a huge amount of work in sifting through the evidence from the 200 entrants. The experience was one of careful love for the Church, in that the care and promotion of good Churches from the architectural point of view. Good, beautiful architecture is so important for the life of a healthy Church.

The event was a first but then it is the 60th anniversary of the E.A.S.A. This was the first time they had held their annual meeting in Lambeth Palace and the first time for this competition.

The gold award was for St. Paul's Church in Bow Common, East London, known locally as the Gate of Heaven! That is such a good title for all Churches, and would that it was always true also for our Church in what the people find as they enter the building and then often share in the sacred liturgy. The bronze award went to St. Brides Church in Kilbride in the Diocese of Motherwell. A delightful and articulate Parish Priest with two close members of his congregation came from there.

The Vicar of St. Paul's (who had retired only a week before) spoke very well about the Church in his long experience at Bow. He pointed out that both the Architecture and all that went on in Church supported and helped the relationships between people which then supports this concept of Church being a foretaste of heaven. He was humorous and articulate. He helped me to sense in a new way another aspect of architecture. It is to help people truly to worship and God and do so together with others, in relationship with them. The Church building should enhance our ability to relate and belong to each other. I began to think of our Church and its beautiful sanctuary, enfolded in the arms of the supporting columns of the Church, with the beautiful stained glass windows. The Stations of the Cross surrounding the congregation including the priest gives the spiritual foundation for all that we are about! The glass with its constantly changing colours and the light within the Church constantly changing helps us to see and feel the living nature of our journey to God together.

The criteria to enter the competition were that the Church was built since 1953, and it is still in use and contributes to the local community. Also it is for Churches of any denomination, but not for Cathedrals. The organisers of E.A.S.A. were adamant about how hard it was to choose the final three, indeed the final ten, and actually went through the last ten with a kind of order from the tenth to the first. There were slides of each of those ten Churches, and each was a magnificent example of beauty.

There were nine representatives of the top three to receive awards and we were given privileged reserved places at the front in the Lambeth Palace Chapel where the main event took place. What an honour to be present!

It was good to mingle and mix with many people afterwards in such a friendly way. I pointed out that our Church was under the care of Ampleforth Abbey, since 1845 and afterwards various people came up to chat. I met Edward Stourton's mother; she is an artist and part of the award organisation; her quite famous son had been in St. Hugh's house in Ampleforth College and is well known on the radio. She has another two sons who also were students at Ampleforth. I also met an architect from Winchester, the brother in law of a former Ampleforth pupil, Fr. David Wilson, a Westminster Priest now 74 years of age who works with L' Arche in France. The Winchester Architect, Keith Bennett is a strong Catholic man, and very involved in the life of the Church in Winchester. I met a cousin of Fr. Aidan Gilman, John Hill from Exeter, who was again a lovely man. Fr Aidan to my knowledge is the only Ampleforth monk who has tried the hermit vocation, and he has grown and grown in his holy journey, like another man whom we know well in Leyland, Fr. Theo Young. Not surprisingly both are alike and good friends to this day. I met a Church and School surveyor who had come down to this event: he has been involved in the new Carmelite Monastery near Calderstones Park in Liverpool and knew our Church too. He is involved with a former member of our community, Fr. Thomas Cullinan, now incardinated into the Archdiocese of Liverpool, and Fr. Thomas helps him a lot. There was another Architect from Wallingford near Oxford who has recently become a Catholic from a Pentecostal background. He is very enthusiastic that he is now in full communion with the Catholic Church and deeply grateful for at last coming home to the reality of real union with Jesus in the Eucharist. It fills him with utter joy. He wrote to me like this about it:

When eventually I received communion for the first time, it was the most profound and affecting experience which initiated huge inner changes in me. I now feel so joined to Jesus and so deeply inserted into His Church. It's a spiritual rebirth - everything has fallen into place very rapidly. I've lost nothing from the past, but I feel I have emerged blinking into the light of a much larger spiritual landscape, a larger treasury of wisdom and practical discipleship. I am very, very happy. It's such an unlooked-for and exciting new beginning.

The Archbishop of Canterbury was meant to be present for the whole event and to present the awards, but had been caught up in an important meeting for the choosing of a new Anglican Bishop, a statutory task. But he came for ten minutes before being whisked away to some other duty.



Archbishop Justin Welsby addressing us briefly in the chapel of the Palace where the awards were made. Next to him Fr. Duncan Ross, the Vicar of St. Paul's Bow whose Church won the Gold Prize. The Archbishop was meant to be with us all day but other commitments made that impossible.

He spoke well and hopefully of the future of the Church, echoing the line of thought of the Vicar from Bow. Good architecture is in function of the living of authentic faith. Where there is very poor architecture that can in no way be called "A Gateway to Heaven" then it may be there will not be an authentic faith. We need excellent architecture to support us in our faith journey. He was delighted to know that there are so many excellent modern Churches in the UK, a sign of hope for the future. He is hopeful man and Christian leader for the future of Christianity, and seems to get on well with Pope Francis.



A Portrait of a young Archbishop Cranmer, whose influence at the beginning of the Anglican Church was immense for the history of our country.

The friendly welcome for all, its ecumenical nature, the setting in the medieval Lambeth Palace and the presence of a remarkable group of people was a very good mix for a very good occasion. The Lambeth Palace authorities also laid on a wonderful lunch and afterwards, a welcome cup of tea as well as a brief tour of the Palace. It gave me a sense that the Catholic and Anglican Churches really are “sister churches” and in this country the history of the UK is intrinsically bound up with the Church of England. We Catholics have a unique contribution to make on the common journey to a future united Church which will lead to a new development in our Island Story.



Art Work in the Palace entitled "He's got the Whole World in his Hands"

I hope this is helpful,

Yours ever in God's Great Love that unites us in the Body of Christ, the Church,
Fr. Jonathan

PS You can see good pictures and more about the content in the above letter from the following websites. The first is a press release from yesterday: the second gives photos etc. of the Churches involved. The third shows all the 200 Churches in the competition, the fourth the best 24 churches.

<http://www.c20society.org.uk/news/best-modern-churches-winners-announced/>

<http://www.bdonline.co.uk/news/east-london-church-wins-architecturecompetition/5063291.article>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/nationalchurchestrust/sets/72157637391772643>

www.bestmodernchurches.org.uk

A specially shot 4 minute video about St Paul's Church, Bow Common, is available for use and can be downloaded at <http://vimeo.com/78714684>