

spinning, and it was hard to break away from the task for the barbeque lunch.

The programme for the afternoon included a walk through the Wyre Forest led by Cedric Quayle, John Iles and Tim Selman. We were told the details of the Wyre Forest Management Plan. The place of woodland management and coppicing in the Plan were explained and we were shown the difference between areas which had been cleared, allowing more light in and encouraging regrowth, compared with trees which had been left to grow tall, reaching for the light, which in turn prevented light getting through to the undergrowth. The walk also included a visit to St George's Farm, with



Workshop: Writing Recipes for Wealth in the

Tim Selman explaining how the Guild was hoping to develop the outbuildings to create offices and accommodation and to

run courses and workshops for architectural students from Cardiff University who were studying the diverse uses of oak (see pp. 18-19).

Tea and cakes were laid on back at the Farm after the walk and time was allowed for a recap on the day and for farewells, before everyone set off in different directions to return home. As a fairly new Companion, I very much appreciated the opportunity of spending time informally with other Companions and seeing and experiencing the continuation of Ruskin's ideas in practice.

Christine Parker

'EDUCATION FOR EDUCATION'S SAKE?': A SYMPOSIUM AT TOYNBEE HALL

Download the programme and listen online: <www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk/education/>

On Saturday, 11th October, about 35 Companions and guests gathered at Toynbee Hall for a symposium on Ruskin and modern education. Organised by Companions Sara Atwood and Paul Tucker, the day consisted of two shorter papers and a plenary lecture, followed by a panel discussion joined by three further contributors who made introductory remarks to set out their views. This was the third time the Guild had collaborated with the Ruskin Library and Research Centre at Lancaster University to run a symposium.

The Master welcomed everyone to the original university settlement where many graduates from Oxford, deeply influenced by Ruskin's values, lived at the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth. For many, living among the poor in the East End was the beginning of a life of public service. Several prominent Guild Companions were among them: two Masters, Hugh Charles Fairfax-Cholmeley and T. Edmund Harvey; John Howard Whitehouse, whose collection forms the basis of the Ruskin Library, was Toynbee's Secretary immediately before Clement Attlee assumed that role; and Howard Hull, Director of Brantwood, who attended the symposium, worked at Toynbee Hall helping to organise its centenary celebrations in 1984. The arts-and-crafts building provided the perfect setting for the day's events. Lunch was served in Ashbee Hall—Charles Ashbee, the founder of the Guild of Handicraft, having run a Ruskin Society at Toynbee in the 1880s.

The Master said that whilst for Ruskin knowledge and understanding were valuable, they must be interwoven and

enhanced by experience to count as education. Ruskin focused his educational efforts on women and working-class men, groups largely ignored by other Victorian educationists. He had contributed to the teaching of art and industrial design, and had lectured at Oxford, the Working Men's College and elsewhere. His concern was to educate the eye, hand and heart, believing in the inseparability of body and soul. Ruskin derived much of his educational philosophy from his mother, who taught him to read, specifically to read the whole of the Bible and learn much of it by heart. He taught that pictures, buildings and landscapes can be read, too. 'If only', Wilmer concluded, following Ruskin, 'our educators could teach us to admire.'

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Sara Atwood's paper followed on perfectly, eloquently exploring the question of how we value education in a market economy. She cited the 'one million words' challenge of a school in Arizona where she lives. It's fine to have a target, she said, but were these words worth reading? It is the question Ruskin would have asked. The incursion of



market forces—the imperative to measure, quantify, and calculate—had driven down the number and duration of recreational breaks and had led to less emphasis being placed on art. Ruskin wanted people to look closely at the world, to see something, a philosophy that was underpinned by his conviction that the 'Law of Help'—the interdependence of all things—was an inviolable Truth. A thirst for applause is easily quenched today by social media. Education should be about much more. The aggressive market demands that have penetrated to the heart of educational policy have led Governments to stake claims that they are out-educating the rest of the world, a phenomenon encapsulated in ideas such as the 'race to the top' in the US. Good governance, social justice, happiness, peace, community, citizenship, mutualism, and responsibility are all subordinated to the marketplace and to the perceived necessity of economic success. Prizes, cash incentives, leader-boards, competition: extrinsic



motivation has a long-term negative effect. The ‘real’ world, we keep being told, requires preparation for employment. Even at school, we are producers and consumers now. We don’t make happy carpenters any more. Dr Atwood related how her own college students in Arizona were, on the whole, unwilling or unable to engage in meaningful discussion. Unmeasurable Ruskinian virtues are out-of-favour and the difference between education and training has become blurred. We need to ask what sort of society we want? Do we want children who can Google paintings in an instant, or who take time to look at them? Curiosity, wonder, even confusion surely play a more important role in the transformative process of a proper education than much of what counts for education today?

Picking up directly where Dr Atwood left off, Dinah Birch’s keynote lecture was characteristically eloquent, an exploration of the roots of Ruskin’s thinking about perfection, or more precisely of imperfection and failure, and how it relates to nineteenth-century notions of education. How can we connect those Victorian ideas with our twenty-first century understanding of education? she asked. The belief in the imperfection of humanity is born out of Ruskin’s Christian faith—man’s fallen nature was a dominant doctrine among Evangelicals. Like Wilmer, Prof. Birch saw the role of Margaret Ruskin as crucial. She believed that humanity has a duty to use its talents in God’s service. Margaret had hoped her son would be a preacher or a teacher. But Ruskin also drew on the Romantic inheritance from his father, with whom he read novels and travelled.

Prof. Birch then traced Ruskin’s uncompromising insistence on the absolute law that imperfection is vital in art, craft and architecture, to the same quality in nature itself. Prof. Birch traced this thread in Ruskin’s life by reference to Turner, to ‘The Mystery of Life and Its Arts’ and ‘The Nature of Gothic’ and argued persuasively that this belief in imperfection lies at the base of Ruskin’s philosophy of education. Ruskin’s perspective was in exact and stark contrast to Matthew Arnold’s. Arnold famously defined culture as ‘the study of perfection’. In part the contrast can be explained by the difference between Arnoldian

thinking and Ruskinian *doing*. Both Arnold and Ruskin opposed the mechanical in education. Ruskin’s enduring hatred of competitive exams derives from this belief in imperfection and its role in the creative imagination:

Good pictures do not teach a nation; they are the signs of its having been taught. Good thoughts do not form a nation; it must be formed before it can think them. Let it once decay at the heart, and its good work and good thoughts will become subtle luxury and aimless sophism; and it and they will perish together.—*The Cestus of Agaia*.

For Ruskin, it was not so much a case of ‘education for education’s sake’, but education for the liberation of the individual. The drive for perfection in the twenty-first century is destructive. There are those who expect too much and who often burn themselves out, and those who expect too little because perfection is unreachable. Yet the acceptance of failure is crucial. One answer is that we should recognise the value of the creative arts in education. The Guild’s Campaign for Drawing had been a fine example of the value of doing just that. Creative writing is vital, too. We need opportunities positively to acknowledge failure. The system is over-prescriptive, and whilst skills of course need to be honed, people *do* need guidance and something to imitate—copying and practice are indeed vital—yet people need space to explore and to create, to allow the opportunity for individual development and growth. The current educational struggle has deep roots, and Ruskin is among those who can help us to find new answers to an old challenge.

In the discussion that followed, a dominant theme was the gender divide: young men and young women can be casualties of not having internalised a work discipline. There was a feeling expressed that there needs to be a move away from the culture of unrelenting assessment. There is too much ‘dividing up’ in education—making for small packets or snippets of unconnected learning. It is not exceptional for 18-year-olds, Prof. Birch said, to go to Russell Group universities without ever having read a novel in its entirety. The Master added that this packaged approach kills the joy of reading, because the experience is incomplete. Reading gives a sense of what it is like to be someone else, or at least to understand someone else’s point-of-view. Prof. Birch spoke of the ‘fizz’ one feels when making new connections, and forming ideas in the mind: it is an example of deep pleasure. Children will find books that adults don’t approve of that will mean something to them. But there are growing issues of access because of the running down of school libraries.

(From the top) Clive Wilmer; Sara Atwood; the audience in the Lecture Hall during Dr Atwood’s talk; Prof. Dinah Birch; Paul Tucker; Howard Hull; and Prof. Stephen Wildman. All photos: John Iles.

Co-organiser and Companion Paul Tucker (University of Florence) spoke on “Thoughtful labour”: Ruskin and the nature of education” analysing the asymmetrical relationship between learner and teacher. Drawing on Stefan Collini, Tucker argued that higher education was no longer considered a public good guided by educational judgment, but rather by a lightly regulated market in which student choice is sovereign. For Ruskin, to educate and to govern were one and the same: a vital, formative process subordinating learner to educator, a process that might be characterised as ‘thoughtful labour’. Tucker delivered a careful analysis that probed the intricacies of Ruskin’s precise distinctive use of language, and which looked closely at the education process through the lens of speech-act theory. Ruskin wrote that, ‘I know myself to be a true master, because my pupils are well on the way to do better than I have done.’ We live that we may learn.

Stephen Wildman then introduced a panel of three short presentations that preceded a panel discussion that included all of the day’s speakers, as well as participation from the audience. This session was chaired by Andrew Tate of Lancaster University. Dr Tate ably and humorously summarised the papers up to that point, and reminded us that Ruskin was the defender of Modern Painters, as well as Old Masters: we must be open to new and emerging ideas, too.

Melissa Benn, an education campaigner enthusiastically delivered ‘Some thoughts on Ruskin’s relevance to present-day debates on education’. Commending thoughtful labour, she underlined the limitations of the three Rs; spoke of the role of families and household relationships in shaping children’s education; and the importance of process compared to outcomes—and she lamented that in practice our emphasis is typically reversed. Learning by heart is ‘Goveite’, she insisted; learning by transfer was what was needed. A fact-led curriculum could never give the arts and humanities their proper place. We have lost sight of the paramountcy of doing things in order to lose oneself—and losing oneself in doing. Ruskin understood the connectedness of different subjects. Education was rapidly becoming an increasingly expensive prize, a vehicle for ambition, striven for because it confers status. Put children themselves in charge of art budgets and canteen budgets, she suggested: they and we will learn a great deal from that.

Aonghus Gordon (Ruskin Mill Trust) spoke inspiringly on ‘Education from the inside out’. Ruskin underpinned the coordinating principles of the Trust’s work, he said: charity, education, enterprise, science, nature and co-operation. The Trust deliberately embraced those excluded from

mainstream education, and Gordon related the example of finding room at the Trust for the ‘Croydon tyre-slasher’. In concentrating on the hand, on touch, on sensory boundaries; in nurturing craftsmanship; in ‘accurate discipline in doing’—it was possible for individuals failed by the state system to thrive. Neurologists have validated Ruskin before educationists have, he said. Funding streams have to be declared in medicine, Gordon remarked, but not in education, and why not? Role-modelling was a way of re-forging relationships. Emotional cognitive resistance is the embodiment of the heart in the head, and the head in the body. In education, we need to go to nature, as Ruskin did. We need to disestablish the classroom and take the pupil to the tree—not the tree to the classroom. Our mission should be to draw (to attract) not to push (or repel).

Challenging much of what had gone before, Anthony O’Hear (Professor of Philosophy, University of Buckingham) proved provocative with his short paper, “‘You alone can bring them into their right minds’: a few Ruskinian thoughts on education’.

It was necessary to know things, not by learning facts, but by initiation in culture. Introducing children to the worlds of Art, Music, and History was vital. Reading Ruskin on Milton, O’Hear found conflicting elements in Ruskin’s thought. We cannot hope to be original so we learn from others. What, O’Hear asked, is the intrinsic value of education? It is a question not sufficiently examined by anyone, including Ruskin. Enjoyment and happiness are not necessary, O’Hear insisted. Do we want, as Mill put it, to have ‘a fool satisfied, or

(From the top) Dr Andrew Tate; Melissa Benn; Aonghus Gordon, Prof. Anthony O’Hear; Benn and O’Hear in conversation; and (below) Dr Jim Dearden talking with Dr Sara Atwood and Chris Harris. All photos: John Iles.



Socrates dissatisfied'? 'We should be trying to make children *unhappy* with what they *are*, and to aspire', O'Hear said. Education is an end in itself, but how should it be 'produced'? O'Hear's belief was that the state was not the right provider of education because it would always defer to economic imperatives and political aims (what he called 'indoctrination'). It could and should still be free, but provided by others.

Thanks in large part to O'Hear, the debate that followed was lively, though he found himself in a minority of one in the disputatious dialogue that ensued. Benn was first to respond. Cultural literacy is important, but how it is delivered is vital. Enjoyment is essential to learning, but difficulty within learning is crucial, too. She totally disagreed about the role of the state. O'Hear responded that cultural literacy is a means of being creative. Prof. Birch commented that 'happiness' was perhaps being misunderstood. Put more accurately, the view she had been advancing was that pleasure and enjoyment were derived from conquering difficulty, that education should mean making new connections, not simply confirming an individual's sense of identity. The love of puns among children is a powerful example of this, she said: a real and challenging expansion of meaning and self. Dr Atwood agreed, and underlined the distinction between this and traditional notions of what fun means. Howard Hull spoke of the need to train and discipline the mind: we need to know things—but not by rote; technology has set us challenges and opened up opportunities in this respect.

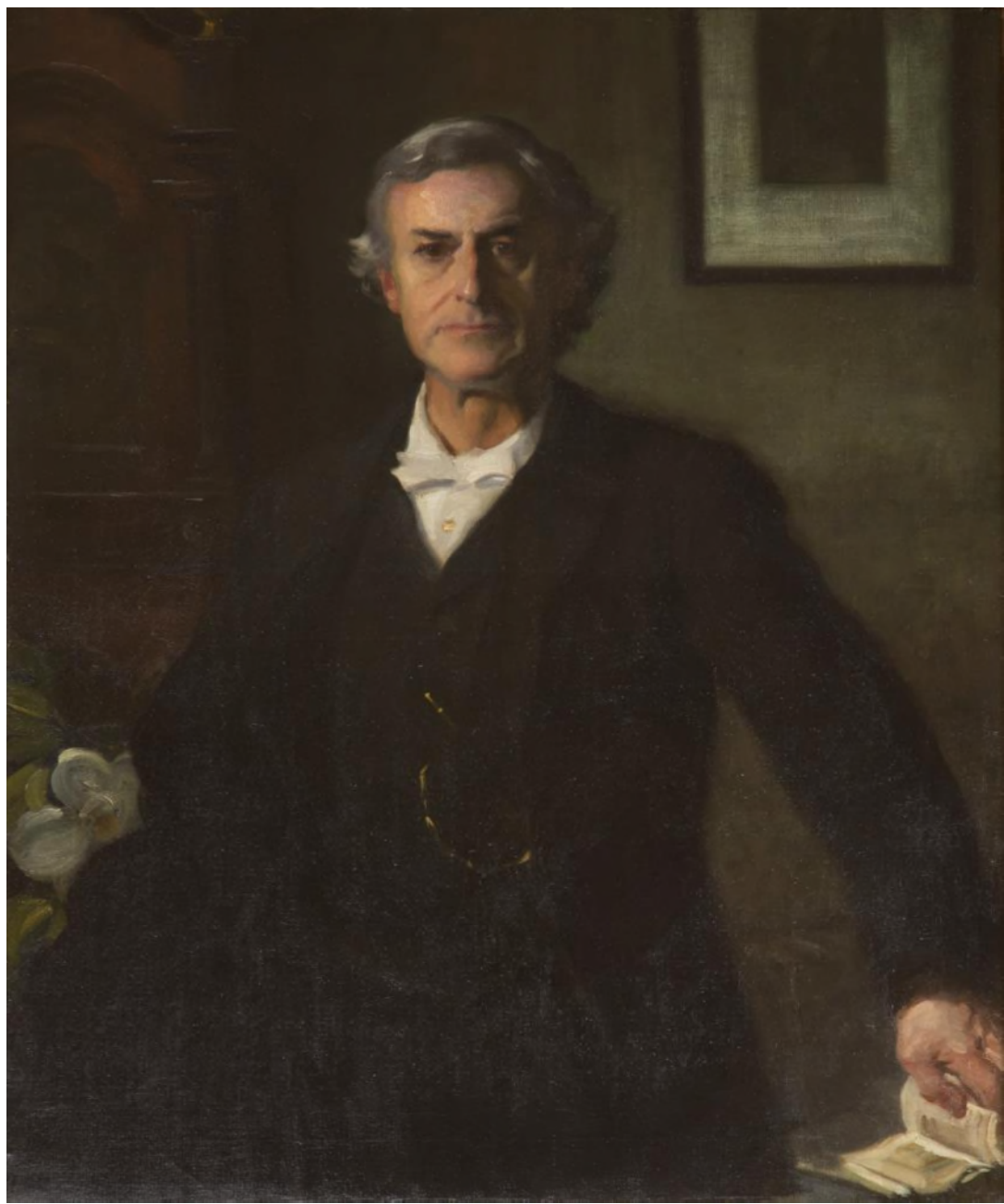
The independence of the independent sector is vital, O'Hear said. But Benn argued that for the type of students in the independent sector, their privileged position was such that it would be difficult to fail. O'Hear further provoked debate when he spoke about the duties and responsibilities of parents. Prof. Birch pointed out that many parents have not had a sufficient education themselves to make informed decisions on behalf of their children. O'Hear said that he found this position deeply patronising and unconvincing. The State, he said, could compel parents who neglect their children to take an interest in their education. Benn argued that often middle-class advantage is often confirmed by the system. Peter Miller commended the comprehensive system as an equaliser. Gordon responded that he did not trust the state to deliver education because of the dangers of political interference. State methodology was leading to rising

cases of exclusion. Benn countered that the dangers of corporate interference were potentially greater, but acknowledged that the state as it was now run was often not a good education provider, but that it *could* and *should* be. John Iles, busily handling the roving mic all afternoon, remarked that most people didn't crave choice, what they wanted was their local school to be of a high standard, and of value to the community. Prof. Birch also

warned of the dangers of parents perpetuating social divisions. In her comprehensive school, Birch was confronted by new ideas and experiences that would not have fallen to her from her farming parents, she said.

It was a lively and successful symposium which took place at a venue rich in Ruskinian associations on an unusually sunny and warm autumn day.

Stuart Eagles



PAST MASTER:

HENRY ELFORD LUXMOORE (1841-1926)

This portrait of Luxmoore, which hangs in the Hall at Eton College, where Luxmoore was both a student and a Master, is by Charles Wellington Furse (1868-1904).

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