



## The Peace Triptych

By Joan Hiller, January 2017

I was interested to try and find out more about the triptych in the Airmen's Chapel, which is a very unusual war memorial. I found that Hamish Moyle is living and painting in Northern Ireland, and has a website on which our triptych features. I wrote to him and he replied by email.

He was asked by the Fabric Committee to produce a painting on the theme of 'peace' to hang above an altar made from an aeroplane and below a large stained glass window.

He says 'when closed, the painting's focus is an air battle over a muddy landscape with the stricken dove of peace caught in barbed wire and an injured airman with his hand in water dreaming of happier expanses of water. When open, the focus is the central water lily '...still do I love, still shed my innocent light, my blood for thee.' I had always assumed the airman was dead, and was glad to know he was alive!

The inclusion of Edith Sitwell's poem 'Still Falls the Rain', which is actually about the bombing of London, appears to have been his doing as he said he had been struck and inspired by it years before. The Sitwell Estate gave permission and waived all fees.

Hamish presented a maquette and sketches to the Fabric Committee and later to the Cathedrals Advisory Commission for England. Christine Whitehouse found a letter from them to Provost Murray Irvine in the Library encouraging the commissioning of the work with which they were delighted. They recommended that no specific RAF insignia be included, so that the significance should be as universal as possible (but had no objection to a blue shirt). They also recommended that there should be a regular timetable for opening and closing the leaves so that the whole concept could be readily appreciated, and this continues.

I was very surprised to discover from the website that a second, larger triptych was commissioned from Hamish by the Fabric Committee in 1991. Open, this depicts a young, semi-naked boy standing with open arms in a garden in front of white flowers (roses?) and water lilies on a pond. The airman resurrected? This triptych was presented to Murray Irvine on his retirement. When I returned to the website some weeks later, it had been altered and this image had been removed, possibly for data protection reasons.