

In the Village

MASTER DESMOND BROWNE

The Chapel of St Christopher, Great Ormond Street Hospital

The chapel for the children's hospital was completed in 1875, and is said to have been described by Oscar Wilde as 'the most delightful private chapel in London'. Designed by Edward Middleton Barry, the third son of Sir Charles Barry (the architect of the Houses of Parliament), its Byzantine grandeur belies its size. The stained glass by Clayton and Bell and the mosaic flooring by the Venetian, Antonio Salviati, allegedly modelled on the pavement in St Mark's are the highest of high Victorian style. The chapel was originally an integral part of the hospital, but the hospital's redevelopment plans in the 1980s meant it could not stay in place. What followed was an astonishing feat of engineering; the whole building was braced against movement, floated on a huge concrete raft and then lowered to the ground from its location on the first floor. The hospital guide describes how 'it was then moved on greased slides by hydraulic rams to its new position where it arrived without mishap and with half an inch to spare'. The late Princess of Wales re-opened it on Valentine's Day, 1994.



The Dolphin Tavern, Lamb's Conduit Passage

Andrew Mussell's article in *Graya News No 25* was illustrated by a photograph showing the damage done to the garden-side of Gray's Inn Hall by a Zeppelin raid on 18 October 1915. The raids had started earlier that year, and on 9 September this old Victorian pub (subsequently re-built) was hit by a bomb dropped by Zeppelin L13, killing three men. You can still see the blackened pub clock with the hands stopped at 10.40 pm, the moment the bomb fell.



Graya News No 25

In Andrew's article on p 18 we omitted to say that the photograph of 4 Gray's Inn Square was reproduced by courtesy of the Imperial War Museum.

McKanna Meats, 21 Theobald's Road

The excellent 'Fryer's Delight', described in one food guide as 'a proper cabbies' fish 'n chips' has a home for carnivores next door. An amazing range of meat, game (particularly grouse) and poultry is sold at surprisingly modest prices together with cheese and chutney. Try the Gloucester Old Spot sausages and the Vacherin Mont D'Or when in season. Above all, go during the week – on Saturdays the queue is out the door.



Thornback & Peel, 7 Rugby Street

Juliet Thornback (a former florist) and Delia Peel (once a theatre designer) produce entrancing screen-printed fabrics for the home, often based on 19th century wood engravings. Particularly appealing are their kitchen aprons combining rabbits and cabbages – an image straight from Mr McGregor's garden and the world of Beatrix Potter.

A France & Son, 45 Lamb's Conduit Street

Lamb's Conduit Street has seen many changes over recent years, but one constant remains – the Art Deco frontage of France's, the funeral directors. The France family have been undertakers since 1780 when the profession was known as 'upholders'. In those days they had premises in Pall Mall and held George III's warrant. The firm were responsible for the funeral of Lord Nelson in January 1806, and a contemporary newspaper account recorded that Mr France had 'permitted all ranks of people, without distinction, to go into his house for the purpose of having a complete and close view of the magnificent state coffin'. The funerals of the last three Cardinal-Archbishops of Westminster have all been France's responsibility.



Cigala, 54 Lamb's Conduit Street

The publicity for this proudly authentic Spanish restaurant boasts that former local residents, Virginia Woolf, E M Forster and Maynard Keynes would be regulars if they were still around. This claim is the only pretentious thing about the restaurant, whose owner/chef was one of the co-founders of Moro. Excellent devilled crab and prawns with garlic and chilli combine with a wine-list searching out at reasonable prices vineyards few of us have ever heard of. Ring up half an hour before and order paella. Doggy bags are provided, if it is all too much.

Albion Wine Shippers, 56 Lamb's Conduit Street

Albion has wines and spirits stacked on shelves from floor to ceiling, and all over the floor as well. The range is astonishing; their publicity boasts that 'you can find it all here', whether it be an artisan Wisconsin gin or a Mexican Nebbiolo. They also sell delicious Italian figs soaked in rum and covered in chocolate. Most appealing to me are their Riesling, Silvaner and Scheurebe wines from Franconia, the area around Wurzburg. Astonishingly this is the 600th anniversary of the Burgerspital wine estate, which has been using characteristic flattened round bottles – bocksbeutel – since 1726.



Persephone Books, 59 Lamb's Conduit Street

There are now no less than 115 beautifully produced titles in Persephone's collection of neglected classics, mainly by women writers. This is par excellence the home for browsing bookworms. On my last visit I discovered *The World that was Ours* by Hilda Bernstein, an account of the Rivonia trial in 1964 which led to the acquittal of Hilda's husband, Rusty, but the conviction of Nelson Mandela and his co-accused. The late Master Hepple was one of those arrested but the charges against him were dropped in the belief that he would be giving evidence for the state. As an account of a trial, it is as masterly as Sybille Bedford on Bodkin Adams or Rebecca West on Nuremberg. The state, Mrs Bernstein writes, stopped at nothing: 'neither in forcing testimony from witnesses under duress, in the suborning of false evidence, nor in the coaching of witnesses.'



The Foundling Museum, 40 Brunswick Square

In 1739 at Somerset House George II gave Thomas Coram a Royal Charter to establish a 'Hospital', effectively an orphanage. Coram had previously spent time in America, where he had advocated land rights for the Mohicans. Back in London he drew the King's attention to 'the frequent murders committed on poor miserable infant children at their birth by their cruel parents to hide their shame'. By 1741 the Hospital was in operation with a coat of arms designed by William Hogarth. The first babies were admitted at night after the lights had been put out to ensure the privacy of their mothers. Hogarth and Handel, who paid for the chapel organ, provided enthusiastic support for Coram, who by then was aged 70. Hogarth's portrait of Coram is of the warts and all school. The captain's waistcoat is unbuttoned, his red coat is crumpled and the state of his white hair reveals why his contemporaries were all painted in wigs. His face reveals the plain-spoken character of the man who was removed from the Board of Governors a year later. Even when fallen on hard times, he continued distributing gingerbread to the children.

