

Discover *and* Acquire

HARRY GRAY *and* WILL HILL 2015

i t a ... i n v e i t a .
e t ... a c q u i u i t a
a r e t i o g a . s c i e
n t i a e . t u r g a r
a t a ... i f v e n j a .
e t ... p e q u i s i w a
p r e t e o g a . s k i e
n o i a r . m a r w a r
i t a ... e f v e n t a .
e t ... p s q u t s i t x
a b e t i o s a . j c l e
n t p a e . m u r w a y
i b a ... i n g e i j a .
e n ... p e r u t s v t a
p r e t e o g a . j c l e
n t p a r . t u v w a r
i b a ... e f g e n t k .
e n ... p e r u t u i t a
a b e d i o s h . s c i m
n t p a r . t u r g a y
i b c ... e f v e i j k .
e n ... a q r s t v y x
a b e t e o g h . s c l e
n o p a r . t a r g a y
a b a ... e n g e l j k
m a ... p e r s i u v x
a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
o p q r s t u v w x y z
* p q r s t u v w x y z
* p q r s t u v w x y z



Discover and Acquire

IN JUNE 2013 Robert Myers, the landscape architect who was rejuvenating the design and planting in Ashby Court asked me to consider making artworks for the two empty niches which are part of the Forbes Mellon Library. The niches are at ground level and face outwards across Ashby Court to the University Library.

These niches had once housed public pay phones but were now empty and a bit forlorn.

I visited the space during the day and at night and I quickly decided that the artworks needed to incorporate lighting to make the space much more welcoming especially after dark. I had the idea to use laser cut steel to make a screen that would work like a Moroccan lantern.

First ideas centred around the niche's use as a pay phone booth and I considered piercing a screen with the sound wave pattern made by Alexander Graham Bell's first recorded telephone conversation in 1876.

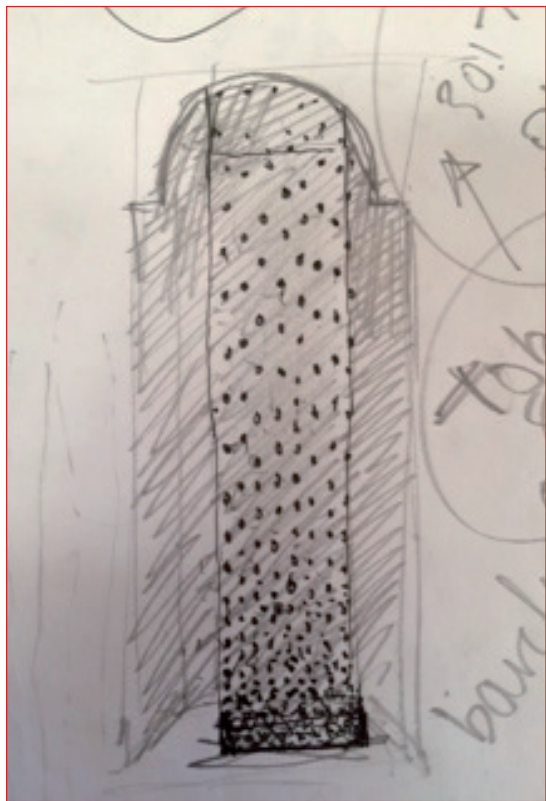
I also thought of using a pierced pattern linking the Nitrogenous bases present in DNA, made famous by Clare alumnus James Watson.

Instead I concentrated on finding an idea that related to the building that housed the niches.

As the niches were directly underneath the Forbes Mellon Library I thought that a screen with letters coming up from ground level and into the Library would fit the site well. An alphabet would flow upwards like champagne bubbles with the spacing increasing as the letters rose up into the library above.

I needed to find someone who was both creative and an expert in typography to help realise my design. I showed my ideas to Will Hill, the course leader of the MA in Graphic Design and Typography at Anglia Ruskin University. He was keen to be involved and our creative collaboration began.

Will and I developed the ideas and made a model to present to the Clare Art Committee chaired by Bill Harris in September 2013.



HARRY GRAY AND WILL HILL 2015



The committee liked the design but asked that the artwork relate more specifically to Clare College.

The idea of resolving the pierced lettering into a detail from one of the College Statutes given by Lady Elizabeth of Clare in 1359 was arrived at in conversation with Anne Hughes, the Forbes Mellon Librarian, Paul Warren the new bursar, Will and myself.

The commission was approved. The pierced alphabet would begin as empty holes then form into letters that would become words that in turn formed sentences. The top 4 lines of the pierced screen would read:

discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning

The college provided this translation and so it seemed fitting to have one side in English and the other in the original latin.

LATIN SIDE (NORTH):

pretiosa scientiae margarita [...] inventa et [...] acquisita

ENGLISH SIDE (SOUTH):

discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning

While Will worked on creating a stencil letterform and a composition to cleverly replace letters until words could form the statute, I concerned myself with the proportions of the screens and how they would fit into the niches.

WH

The first question I had to consider was the appropriate typographic genre for the project. While it was important to acknowledge the origins of the statute, (some 100 years before the advent of printed type in the west), I wanted to avoid the conscious archaism of the blackletter types used by Gutenberg and his immediate successors.

The Venetian humanist types of Nicholas Jenson and his contemporaries mark a key point in the dissemination of knowledge, and unlike blackletter they have also been revived in the late 19th and early 20th century, notably in William Morris's Golden Type, and Bruce Rogers's Centaur, which provided the model upon which I based my stencil fonts. The letterforms would however need to fulfil some unusual requirements: to work in stencil form and to evolve through a series of weights. Beginning as amorphous shapes, and getting progressively lighter with

i t a ... i n v e i t a .
 e t ... a c q u i u i t a
 a r e t i o g a . s c i e
 n t i a e . t u r g a r
 a t a ... i f v e n j a .
 e t ... p c q u i s i w a
 p r e t e o g a . s k i e
 n o i a r . m a r w a r
 i t a ... e f v e n t a .
 e t ... p s q u t s i t x
 a b e t i o s a . j c l e
 n t p a e . m u r w a y
 i b a ... i n g e i j a .
 e n ... p c r u t s v t a
 p r c t e o g a . j c l e
 n t p a r . t u v w a r
 i b a ... e f g e n t k .
 e n ... p c r u t u i t a
 a b e d i o s h . s c i m
 n t p a r . t u r g a y
 i b c ... e f v e i j k .
 e n ... a q r s t s v y x
 a b e t e o g h . s c l e
 n o p a r . t a r g x y
 a b a ... e n g e i j k .
 m a ... p c r s i u v t x
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n
 o p q r s t u v w x y z
 o p q r s t u v w x y z
 o p q r s t u v w x y z



each line, the letters were to follow a gradual transition to a pristine humanist form at the top of the panel.

The second element was the gradual emergence of the text of the statute out of the letters of the alphabet. Harry had talked about a transition from chaos to order.

I devised a system of progressive letter substitutions, through which the sequence of the alphabet was gradually supplanted by the text of the statutes.

The cryptographically-minded should be able to work out the method and decode the system.

Adding an artwork to an existing and carefully considered architectural space can often look clumsy. To avoid this I made full size plywood shapes and tried them out in the niches until the flute form looked right with the niche's semi- circular arch.

The stainless steel screens are both wider than the niches and taller, so I decided to make a full size replica of the niches in my studio.

This meant that I could make sure of a method of installing the artworks (steel sheet is not something I wanted to have to adapt on site!)

Making a replica niche also meant that I could spend the time in my studio needed to work out the best lighting solution.

I wanted to make the lighting for the artworks interactive and I worked with Pulsar, a Cambridge-based lighting design company.

The solution needed to be both subtle and exciting. I wanted to reward the viewer who spent some time trying to understand what at first appears random and confusing and then resolves into an answer. This seemed a good metaphor for learning in general.

At night the screens glow with a subtle white light but a sensor triggered by the more curious nocturnal visitor will trigger a coloured lighting display.



HARRY GRAY AND WILL HILL 2015

PRAEFATIO DOMINAE FUNDATRICIS

Universis Sanctae Matris Ecclesiae filiis praesentem paginam inspecturis Elizabeth de Burgo domina de Clare salutem et memoriam rei gestae. Experientia, quae rerum omnium est magistra, edocet manifeste quod in omni gradu tam ecclesiastico quam civili non mediocriter proficit scientia literarum: quae dum a multis multipliciter inquiritur, in universitate (in qua vigere dignoscitur studium generale) perfectius invenitur. Quae etiam cum inventa fuerit ipsius auditores qui ejus dulcedinem gustaverunt emittit aptos et idoneos in ecclesia Dei et republica juxta suorum meritorum exigentiam gradus varios ascensuros. Cupientes igitur, hac consideratione inductae, ad augmentum cultus divini reique publicae commodum et profectum, hujusmodi scientiam, quae (morsu pestilentiae sublata multitudo hominum) hominibus lamentabiliter deficere jam incipit, in quantum nobis Deus dedit propagare, ad Universitatem Cantabrigiae Eliensi dioecesi, in qua est congregatio studentium, convertimus oculos mentis nostrae, et aulam inibi existentem, Aulam Universitatis communiter hactenus nominatam, quae de nostra fundatione jam existit, et quam domum de Clare at non aliter volumus perpetuis temporibus nuncupari, in facultatibus de bonis nostris a Deo datis et in numero studentium fecimus ampliari, ut pretiosa scientiae margarita ab eis studio et doctrina in dicta universitate inventa et etiam acquisita non sub modio lateat sed ulterius divulgetur lucemque praebeat divulgata iis qui ambulant in semitis ignorantiae tenebris: et ut scholares in dicta domo nostra antea commorantes sub firmitatis pacis tutela et concordiae commodo valeant studio liberius indulgere, quaedam statuta et ordinationes de consilio peritiorum fecimus infra scripta perpetuis temporibus duratura.

PREAMBLE TO THE STATUTES OF THE FOUNDRRESS, 1359

Elizabeth de Burgh, Lady of Clare, to all children of Holy Mother Church who read these words: greeting and remembrance of our deed! Experience, the universal guide, plainly shows that learning is no mean advantage in every rank of life, ecclesiastical or civil. Though many people seek it in many ways, it is best acquired in a recognised university community; and when its pupils have acquired it and tasted its sweets, it sends them out well qualified to rise according to their merits to different ranks in church and state. But so many men have been swept away by the ravages of the plague that learning has lately suffered a sad decline in numbers. We, therefore, desiring to assist true religion and to further the public good by promoting learning so far as God has put it in our power to do so, have turned our attention to the University of Cambridge in the diocese of Ely, where there is a body of students. Our purpose is that through their study and teaching at the university they should discover and acquire the precious pearl of learning, so that it does not stay hidden under a bushel but is displayed abroad to enlighten those who walk in the dark paths of ignorance. And to enable the scholars residing in our said college to live in harmony under the protection of a firm discipline and so enjoy greater freedom to study, we have with the advice of experts made certain statutes and ordinances, set out below to stand in perpetuity.

With thanks to:

Robert Myers

Donald Hearn

Anne Hughes

Paul Warren

The Art Committee of Clare College

Adam Mortaro of Pulsar Lighting

Hitec Laser

Chris Wilding