

The Rev. Dr. ANDREW WAKEFIELD

A Vice-Chair's Tribute

When Andrew took up his post at St ANDREWS church in 1992, he inherited among his congregation one of our founder members, Stephen Ashcroft, who learned that Andrew had been given the post of Industrial Chaplain for south London by his diocese giving him free licence to spend half his time on wider outreach matters. Stephen roped him in almost immediately. By 1993 Andrew was our membership secretary, and then took the chair by common acclaim in our 1999 AGM.

Initially Andrew took a supervisory role, attending all meetings, and giving us the benefit of his ever increasing knowledge of the workings of Merton Council and the wider community.

The flood caused by a broken boiler in 2004 which put us at serious risk of closure, showed us a real understanding of his presence in the borough when he gave an inspirational address the following summer for our first Summer Opening that made the hard work in re working all the exhibits worth while and underlined the importance of our work in the borough.

That first Summer Opening became an annual event which Andrew was pleased to call the formal opening of the Merton Summer Season, and which he exploited to the full to keep our profile high within the borough. No less than 9 Mayors and past Mayors came to our last opening, a tangible proof of the success of this strategy.

The developing problems of our move to Ravensbury was becoming a major concern and the tricky political balancing acts this entailed. Here Andrew's unparalleled contacts in the Council on both sides of the political divide became a crucial weapon in our armoury. The value of this was demonstrated in 2006 when there was a real chance of us losing our grant, and he was there at the front canvassing councillors for us. In our executive meetings at that time, Andrew, realising the passion of the team then for the ultimate move to Ravensbury, took seriously the need for him to play devil's advocate, to keep our plans realistic (so much so that, perversely, it was Ray Leyden who had to exhort him to 'have faith'!) but yet once a decision was made, was just as fierce an advocate of it to the council in our meetings with them.

During these years Andrew was also operating at a London wide level, because of his place in the London Chamber of Commerce. It seems he had a strong view that London would never win its Olympic bid, and promised Ken Livingstone that he would eat his hat if the bid was successful. Ken kept him to his word, hence a rushed overnight order for a panama shaped cake which Mary put together for him. Sadly no pictures of the hat eating ceremony exist.

Initially the Ravensbury subcommittee was myself and Ray Leyden, because we were concentrating on our lottery bid. In the background, though, the growing problems with Ravensbury meant the problems were more political and legal than financial, which is when Andrew and I first became a team.

As a result, I have had the great good fortune to have spent the last 10 years in frequent conversations with him on any and all subjects, as we have fought our way through the negotiations, and I developed a huge respect for Andrew the person, someone with strong convictions and yet happy to accept that others may not share them however 'wrong' their views might be. It is significant of his openness is that, active tweeter as he was, his last tweet, on 26 October 2016, was to celebrate a bible study group he had just attended at the Reform Movement Synagogue in Wimbledon.

I miss him, and the Museum has suffered a great loss. I hope we can honour his memory by continuing to build on what he has helped us achieve so far.

Nicholas Hart, November 2016