

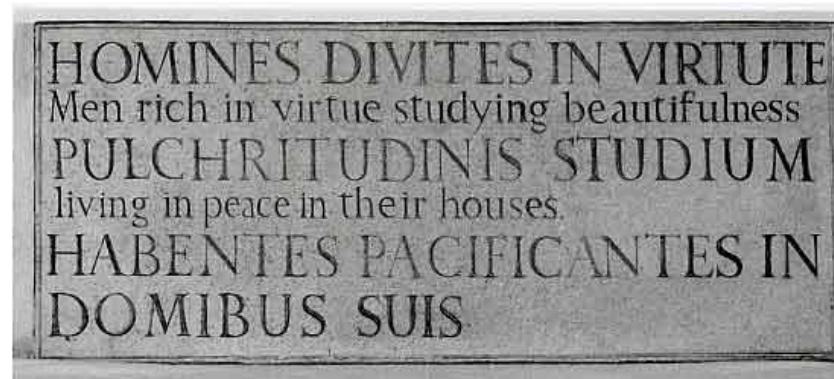
THE GUILD OF ST JOSEPH AND ST DOMINIC

INTRODUCTION

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The Guild of St Joseph and St Dominic was a unique experiment in communal life in the early twentieth century. The story of the Guild began when Eric Gill the sculptor and letter cutter came to Ditchling in 1907 with his apprentice Joseph Cribb and was soon followed by fellow craftsmen Edward Johnston and Hilary Pepler. In 1921 they founded the Guild, this being a Roman Catholic community based on the idea of the medieval guild. These organisations existed for the protection and the promotion of its members' work and had been revived by the leaders of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It was a community of work, faith and domestic life with workshops and a chapel, with members living according to their faith. Its philosophy was encapsulated in what today might be called its mission statement, engraved on a stone plaque, now in Cheltenham Museum.



This statement is particularly eloquent - it sets out the hope for a newly created Eden, set apart from society, where wealth is

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measured by virtue rather than money. Beauty is to be the goal of production rather than output and there is to be a strong domestic element, characterised by peaceful existence. Also, it must be said, it was to be an Eden dominated by men - no woman would be admitted as a guild member until 1972. Its philosophy drew strands from the Arts and Craft movement, from Catholicism and from the Distributist ideas of GK Chesterton and Hillaire Belloc. Significantly, its years of growth followed the Great War when so many young people had come to see modern life and industrial production as venal and dehumanising.

Soon the fame and membership of the Guild grew, early member including the painter and poet David Jones, carpenter George Maxwell, and engraver Philip Hagreen. A key element of the community was the Saint Dominic's Press which was run by Hilary Pepler. It enabled members to circulate their ideas to friends and supporters and provided a creative outlet for every member of their community. The monthly journal it produced, 'The Game' is much sought after today, with copies being advertised for up to one hundred pounds each.

Importantly, Eric Gill left Ditchling in 1924, leaving his apprentice Joseph Cribb to take over the stone carver's workshop but the guild continued to flourish. The Guild continued to attract many new members such as weavers KilBride and Brocklehurst; in 1932 the silversmith Dunstan Pruden joined followed by artist and engraver Edgar Holloway.

Notwithstanding several upheavals, the affairs of the Guild eventually stabilised and it continued for many years; the core of the group was to become Maxwell, KilBride, Pruden and Cribb who together totalled 180 years of membership. Later members were Jenny KilBride (the first female member) who took charge of the weaving workshop and calligrapher Ewan Clayton, grandson of Valentine KilBride. The Guild was finally wound up in 1989 and the workshops demolished.

As to the lessons to be learned, I would like to quote Ewan Clayton's reflections on what life in the Guild was actually like;

"Simplicity, gentleness, peacefulness, domesticity and a kind of unsensational holiness, which is not about being heroic but is about living in a place that you love and learning to respect its rhythms and its plants and its animals and to love them and to go through season after season and the cycles of family life and to celebrate them as a community, in an ordinary way, where your spirituality is an ordinary spirituality rather than an extreme one ...

... and where it is a given, a normal part of life, that you make things with your hands."

Sources

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- *Eric Gill*, Fiona McCarthy, ISBN 0571143024, Faber and Faber, 1989.
- *Eric Gill and Ditchling: the Workshop Tradition*, Ruth Cribb and Joe Cribb, 2007, ISBN 0-9516224-9-8
- *Autobiography*, Eric Gill, Jonathan Cape, 1940.
- *Looking for Mr Gill*, DVD, produced by Luke Holland.
- Website [Ditchling Museum](#) .

Personal comment

This web-site represents a personal view based on my limited research. My own modest involvement with the Guild arises from family background - George Maxwell was my Great Uncle. I visited the Guild only once - around 1970 when my father took me to visit

my Aunt Cissie (Maxwell's widow) and my cousin, John Maxwell. At the age of fourteen, I had little idea what to make of it but the experience stayed with me. In recent years I have read much about the Guild and taken every opportunity to discuss it with other relatives who, like myself made fleeting visits.

I am conscious that very little has been written about the Guild in relation to its significance. Furthermore, much of that which has been written has concentrated on the contribution of Eric Gill. My view is that there is a lot more to be said about the Guild and these pages are intended to be a small step on the way. If anyone reading this material has any comments or information I would be very pleased to hear from them.

John Price

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THE GUILD OF ST JOSEPH AND ST DOMINIC

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HISTORY

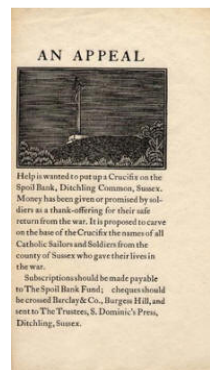
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1. FOUNDATION 1907- 1921



The Guild's symbol, The Hound of St Dominic by David Jones - 1922

The genesis of the Guild was the bond formed by Eric Gill, Hilary Pepler and Edward Johnson during their time at Hammersmith in the early part of the Twentieth Century. When Gill moved to rural Sussex in 1907 in search of country living, the three men remained in contact, and when Johnson was advised by his Doctor to move to the country, he naturally sought out a location near Gill. Pepler soon after followed 'the prophet Johnson into the wilds' and the plan for a self-sufficient community on Ditchling Common evolved. Pepler, by training a civil servant, taught himself the craft of printing, and his printshop, together with Gill's stonemason's workshop and Johnson's calligraphy studio, formed the embryonic community. The first communal effort, a journal called 'The Game' was first produced in October 1916 and became their voice to the wider world.



An entirely new dimension was added to the enterprise in 1917 with the arrival in the area of Fr Vincent McNabb, an influential Dominican Monk. Described, perhaps unfairly, as a 'thirteenth century Monk alive in the twentieth century', his ardent Catholicism and interest in social justice fired the imagination of both Gill, who was a recent Catholic convert and the Quaker, Pepler who became a Catholic soon after. Johnson's interest was also aroused, but he was unable to take the ultimate step of conversion and this was to lead to his falling away from the others. On 29 July 1918, Pepler and Gill together with Gill's wife, Commander Herbert Shove (a local resident) and Desmond Chute (a student of Gill's), became Dominican Tertiaries, in a sense lay members of the Order. They were soon joined by Joseph Cribb, Gill's former apprentice.

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They next set about building a small chapel and to start thinking of a small guild, based on the worship of God rather mammon. Gill also conceived the idea of a crucifix on the nearby hillock, formed from spoil from the railway cutting at the edge of the common and an appeal to this end was launched in 1920, stressing the link with the end of the War:

Also in 1920, moves were taken to give the Guild a formal basis, and a constitution was agreed at a meeting held on 18 July, subject only to approval by Fr McNabb. The announcement of the formation of The Guild however, was not made until the September 1921 edition of The Game which set out the central principals:

- Members must be Dominican Tertiaries
- Craftsmen must own their own workshops and tools, in accordance with the principles of the Papal Encyclical 'Rerum Novarum'
- Work is a form of divine worship, and high standards must therefore be observed.
- Handcraft was a condition of work in the Guild, part of the principle of the rejection of modern life - a type of holy poverty.
- St Joseph, traditionally a craftsman was their patron saint.

2. EARLY DAYS AND THE FIRST CRISIS 1921 - 1925

The early years of the Guild were to be exciting and eventually fractious. The experiment received wide publicity and many young men were interested in its ethos of spiritually inspired counter-culture. A notable departure however, was Desmond Chute who left for the priesthood in 1921. Chute's departure had the effect of undermining the whole project for Gill; he was to write to Chute in 1925 "will anything have the vigour and freshness of that first

spout?".

Notable among the arrivals were David Jones, a brilliant painter and poet, recently emerged from the trenches and much taken with Gill's charismatic personality. His major contribution to the Guild were the impressive murals which decorated the Guild chapel. Other important arrivals in 1922 were Philip Hagreeen, founder of the Society of Wood Engravers and George Maxwell, a carpenter. In addition, many interested Catholics found their way to Ditchling Common for temporary stays. Soon as many as 41 Catholics were living and working as part of the Guild. Around this period, the two leading Catholic lay figures, Hillaire Beloc and GK Chesterton both paid visits.

Perversely, as the Guild success and fame grew, so did Gill's disillusion until in 1925 he made the decision to relocate to the more remote location of Capel y ffin. He sought to take the entire Guild with him, but was able to persuade only his closest acolytes, including Jones and Hagreeen. The Capel project, based in a deserted monastery in the Llanthony valley in the Black Mountains greatly appealed to Gill's sense of drama but caused a fatal rift in his friendship with Pepler and his departure left behind a feeling of resentment amongst other Guild members which never dissipated. His leaving undoubtedly took much of the lustre from the community; it was never glad confident morning again.

3. CONSOLIDATION AND THE SECOND CRISIS 1926 - 1945

Notwithstanding Gill's departure, the Guild held together and continued to attract able and intelligent craftsmen. In 1925 Valentine KilBride started a weavers' workshop and in 1926 became a full member of the Guild. The falling away of its early rigor is evidenced by the dropping, in 1928, of the requirement that Guild members had to become Dominican Tertiaries and, taking advantage of this, its activities were expanded in 1932 when Dunstan Pruden, a gifted silversmith joined the community.

The Guild also developed a congenial social life, the high point being the St Dominic's celebrations on 4th August each year, generally

consisting of a sports day, tea in the orchard, a performance of a drama in the evening and a pub supper. In details like, the quality of life that the Guild enjoyed shines through. Inevitably though, as with all human affairs, problems were brewing. Hilary Pepler was becoming something of a national, even international figure and there was a sense of estrangement between him and the other craftsmen who retained their belief in the simple life. The underlying tension came to a head in 1933, the issue being Pepler's employment of a non-Catholic to assist in his print shop. Pepler was expelled but the terms of settlement remained the subject of legal dispute for many years. Eventually, Pepler vacated his premises on the common and reopened in Ditchling in 1937 under the name 'The Ditchling Press'.

The last of the founders had now left and the spirit of innovation and experiment seems to have been overtaken by a more settled and resigned philosophy. A high point though was the arrival of a promising sculptor, Gill's nephew John Skelton who became apprenticed to Cribb. The war years though, were not kind to the Guild. The KilBride family had to abandon its workshop due to lack of silk for weaving; casualties of the fighting included George Maxwell's son Stephen, Cribb's former assistant Albert Leany and the eldest KilBride son.

4. POST-WAR 1946 - 1988

After the war, the Guild might have seemed like a relic of a bygone era. Nevertheless, it soon found its numbers rising. The KilBrides returned from Scotland in 1946, Edward Holloway joined in 1946 as artist and engraver and Kenneth Edgar replaced Skelton as apprentice to Cribb.

The older generation were now fading from the scene. Gill had died in 1940, Pepler died in 1951, George Maxwell in 1951 and Joseph Cribb in 1967. Reflecting the strength of family life on the common, the younger generation were taking over in some areas. All surviving KilBride children became weavers, Thomas becoming a Guild member in 1960 and daughter Jenny becoming the first female member in 1970. In addition the carpenter's workshop had been

taken over by George Maxwell's son John and Dunstan Pruden's wife Winefride (since 1974, his widow) had also being granted full membership in 1975. What was to be the final admission to membership took place in 1983; fittingly in view of Edward Johnson's part in the origin of the Guild, it was to be a calligrapher, KilBride's grandson Ewan Clayton.

This litany of comings and goings all revolve around members of existing Guild families and that tells its own story regarding the declining ability of the community to appeal to the post-war world. An important amendment to the constitution had been made in 1972 which stated that the Guild members would benefit from a sale instead of the Dominicans as was previously planned. This change had the effect of discouraging the admittance of new members as the older members increasingly came to see the Guild assets as their pension fund. The looming crisis came to a head in 1988 when an offer was received from a development company for the site. Despite a counter-proposal from Ewan Clayton and Jenny KilBride, a vote was passed in favour of sale. The closure of the Guild was filled with acrimony which meant that it was not possible to save any buildings.

The six Guild members at the end were Ewan Clayton, Kenneth Eager, Edgar Holloway, Jenny KilBride, Winifred Pruden and Thomas KilBride,

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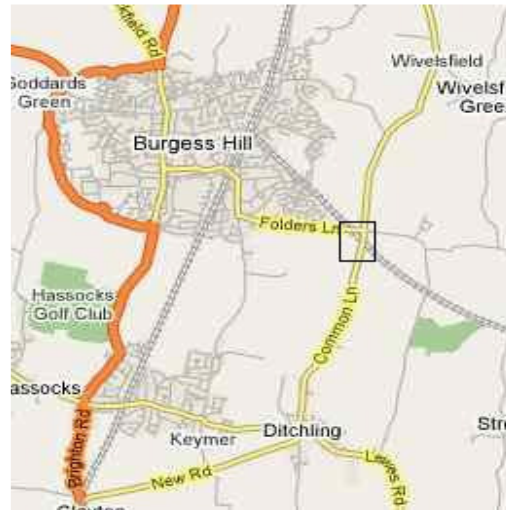
LIFE AT THE GUILD

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1. LOCATION



The Guild is generally referred to as being located on Ditchling Common; this is an area some two miles the north of Ditchling village and on the outskirts of the town of Burgess Hill. The land occupied by the Guild was diagonally opposite the south-west corner of the Ditchling Common Country Park, just beyond the railway line and bounded by Folders Lane to the north and Common Lane to the east. The area lies within the square on the map below.



An aerial photograph of the area as it is today is shown below. The

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Guild land is the centre of the photograph, bounded by hedges to the west and south.



The small triangular piece of land, created by the intersection of the railway line, is significant as this was the location of the [Spoil Bank Crucifix](#), sculpted by Gill. Its elevated position announced the presence of the Guild to the world in general and to railway passengers in particular.

Hopkins Crank is one of the houses to the east and was Gill's home. The two prominent houses to the north of the picture post-date the Guild.

2. BUILDINGS

A detailed plan of the site is set out below. Click on this map to see a upright version.



3. DAILY LIFE

The Guild was considerably more than a working arrangement. It was a complete way of life which included the following, particularly in the first twenty years

- Education for children - a schoolroom was one of the guild buildings
- Living accommodation was provided for several of the families with other Guildsmen living very close
- Several members undertook agricultural production on a small scale with the aim of achieving something close to self sufficiency. As elsewhere in the Guild, only traditional tools

were used.

- Religious worship was a central feature of Guild life, with the monastic divine office of six daily liturgical celebrations taking place in the early days. While the amount of prayer was much reduced as the years passed but it remained part of daily life to the end.

Relations with the village were limited and there was a certain amount of mistrust on the part of villagers. This was partly addressed by having open days (such as on St Dominic's Day) when all villagers were invited.

4. THE SITE TODAY

I visited the site previously occupied by the Guild in 2000. The land alongside Folders Lane was occupied by two new houses but there was still a considerable amount of former Guild land behind the houses which had been left to nature and was completely empty (left). The only traces of the Guilds presence I could find were some small apple trees where there had been an orchard and the base of the crucifix at the head of the spoil bank which was still in place (centre). Also, Gill's old house, Hopkins Crank was still there (right) and is now marked with a plaque.



Adjacent to Hopkins Crank are the following houses and buildings which were connected with (but not owned by) the Guild:

- Little Crank - Gill's Dairy,
- Crank Barn - Gill's workshop,
- Woodbarton - Designed and built by Gill 1921,
- Woodbarton Cottage (The sorrowful mysteries) - Designed and built by Gill in 1921,
- Marysfield (now July House) - Designed and built by Pepler in 1939 for his daughter Mary

THE GUILD OF ST JOSEPH AND ST DOMINIC

MEMBERS

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Introduction

The story of the Guild can be told in many ways. This page introduces the individual stories of some of the men and women who played a major part in its history, offering a perspective of how their involvement arose and the nature of their contribution. All are remarkable figures in their own right and several would justify individual biographies.

Eric Gill (1882 - 1940) - Member of Guild 1920-1924 - Typographer, engraver, sculptor



The most famous member of the Guild and the inspiration behind its foundation. He was born into a large family and raised in the non-Conformist religious tradition. Abandoning early training as an Architect, he took to lettering and stone carving in his early twenties. A move to Hammersmith 1905 led to friendship with Edward Johnson and Hilary Pelper, something which was to continue when Gill, seeking a rural environment, moved to Ditchling in 1907. There his ideas continued to develop along with his artistic reputation; he was received into the Catholic Church in 1913 and soon afterwards was awarded the commission for the Stations of the Cross in Westminster Cathedral, the brilliant realisation of which was to establish his pre-eminence among contemporary sculptors.

His growing concern with self-sufficiency was the driving force behind the foundation of the Guild in 1921, while his restless nature led to its first crisis when he left to found a new community in the

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remote Welsh hamlet of Capel y ffin in 1924, returning to London in 1928. His range of work continued to grow throughout his lifetime, encompassing typography, book design, engraving, social campaigning and sculpture. His Catholicism however, was some way from being orthodox, his version modifying traditional teaching so as to permit full reign to his considerable sexual appetites. The details of his activities were recorded in his personal diaries, revealing the abuse of his daughters and destroying his moral credibility; nevertheless, his creative legacy remains.

[TV programme](#) [Radio programme - 1961](#) [Radio programme - 1992](#)

[Eric Gill site](#) [The Eric Gill Society](#)

Edward Johnston (1872 - 1944) - Not a Guild Member - Typographer



Johnson was responsible for a revival in interest in the art of lettering that took place in the early twentieth century and a major influence on Gill in the early stages of his artistic career. He followed Gill to Ditchling in 1917 and was instrumental in developing the idea of the Guild. He was a religious man, but could not meet the Guild's requirement for conversion to Catholicism, partly due to his wife's Presbyterianism. Nevertheless, he remained part of the wider Ditchling craft community for the rest of his life. His most famous work is his designs for the lettering for the London Underground, a revolutionary script which is the forebear of modern computer fonts such as Arial.

[The Edward Johnston Foundation](#)

Hilary Pepler (1878-1951) - Member of the Guild 1920 - 1934 - Writer, printer.

Pepler had an eclectic career, starting a social worker when he came under Gill's influence at Hammersmith. Gill interested Pepler in the



art of lettering which led to involvement in publishing. and eventually printing when he moved to Ditchling in 1916 to set up the St Dominic's Press, using a traditional handpress in preference to a more automated device. In the same year he abandoned his Quaker faith for Catholicism. He published *The Game*, with Gill and Johnson, airing the views which would lie behind the foundation of the Guild. His friendship with Gill was broken by Gill's move to Wales, and was never to recover, despite the marriage of Pepler's son and Gill's daughter in 1927. His interests spread beyond the Guild in the 1930's into the arena of drama and mime. His insistence on employing a non-Catholic assistant led to his acrimonious departure in 1934, his printing business continuing under the name The Ditchling Press. His mime's were performed widely in Europe and the US to great critical acclaim.

Father Vincent McNabb (1868-1943) - Not a Guild Member - Dominican Monk and Priest



McNabb played a crucial role in introducing religious ideas to Gill's and Pepler's analysis of society's ills. He arrived in Ditching in 1914, armed with ideas about the condition of labour which were to make a great impression on Gill and Pepler, albeit at the expense of their close relationship with Johnson. McNabb was, in effect, spiritual advisor to the project, also securing loans from the Dominican Order to underwrite it. With Gill's departure, he withdrew and the loans were repaid. His outstanding intellect and powerful preaching ensured that he remained a major force in Catholic circles for the rest of his life.

[The Vincent McNabb Society](#)

Desmond Chute (1895 - 1957) - Member of the Guild 1920-1921- Engraver, later Priest

Chute had a brief but important role in the foundation of the Guild.



He was born in Bristol and studied at the Slade School of Fine Art from 1912 and later became friends with Stanley Spenser. Having met Gill 1918, he soon moved to Ditchling to learn stone carving and engraving. He was to leave the Guild however in 1921 in order to enter the priesthood. In a letter to Chute in 1940, Gill confided "how much I love you and how much I owe you" and it is fair to suggest that his departure was an important factor in Gill's alienation from the Guild.

Later he moved for his health to Rapallo in Italy, where he was a friend of Ezra Pound, and one of the Tigullian Circle around him.

Joseph Cribb (1892 -1967) - Member of the Guild 1920 - 1967 - Stone Carver



Cribb was apprenticed to Gill in 1906 and followed him to Ditchling. Having served in WWI, he returned to Ditchling and became a member of the Guild very soon after its foundation. He took charge of the stonemason's shop after Gill's departure, specialising in inscriptions and decorative carvings for new buildings; he did a lot of work for the Brighton Architects John Denman and eventually had his own apprentices, John Skelton, Noel Tabbernor and Kenneth Eager. He continued to work until his death, truly a hero of the Guild.

Commander Herbert Shove (1886 - 1943) - Not a Guild member - Distributist, Ditchling resident



An important influence on the guild. He served in WWI as a submarine Commander during which time he became a Roman Catholic. After the war he lived at Hallett's Farm in Ditchling and was in close touch with Guild members. He was an authority on numerous matters such as silversmithing and bee-keeping but above all, he published important tracts on Distributism, in particular *The Fairy Ring of Commerce*, (a history of commerce) in 1930 and contributing to *Flee to the Fields* (manifesto of the Catholic Land

Movement) in 1934.

His brother Gerald Shove was an economist and a close associate of Maynard Keynes.

He was recalled to service in WWII and was awarded the DSO and the OBE; he became ill while in service and died in 1943 at the RN Hospital, Durdham Down, Bristol.

David Jones (1895 - 1975) - Postulant of the Guild 1924 - 1925 - painter and poet



After Gill, the most celebrated member of the Guild, due to his painting and his modernist war poem, *In Parenthesis* published in 1937.

In his youth he showed an enthusiasm for drawing which was interrupted by service in WWI. Having been drawn to Catholicism during the war, he was introduced to Ditchling by Fr John O'Connor (a friend of GK Chesterton) where he set about learning wood-engraving. He produced some remarkable murals for the Guild chapel, in particular, the painting of Christ being mocked by soldiers attired as English Tommies reveals something of the scars left by his war-time experience. He became a Dominican Tertiary in 1923 but left to join Gill at Capel y ffin in December 1925. He was later to be briefly engaged to Gill's daughter, Petra.

Around 1927 he began to write the poetry that would establish his reputation. In 2002 he was one of the twelve featured War Poets in an exhibition at the Imperial War Museum.

George Maxwell (1890 - 1957) - Member of the Guild 1921 - 1957

Maxwell was a wheelwright from Birmingham, knowledgeable in theology who was introduced to the Guild by Fr McNabb. He



established the carpenter's shop which was to specialise in hand looms and church furniture.

Maxwell was devoted to the Distributist ideal, building his own house, maintaining his own smallholding as well as writing polemical essays on the movement. One son, Stephen, was killed at the Battle of Monte Cassino in 1944; another, Vincent, became a priest and the third son, John continued the workshop after his father's death. One daughter, Teresa had a family which included another priest and his other daughter, Winifred, still lives in Ditchling.



Ethel Mairet (1872 - 1952) - Not a Guild member - Weaver

Ethel Mairet settled in Ditchling with her husband in 1918 and became a key member of the wider craft community. She wrote two books about weaving and dyeing and trained Petra Gill and Valentine KilBride.

Her husband, Philip, was a writer about craft matters.



Valentine KilBride (1897 - 1982) Member of the Guild 1926 - 1981 - Weaver

Disillusion with life as an industrial worker, Kilbride was attracted to the world of crafts and began to teach himself the art of traditional weaving in 1920. In 1922 he joined the Guild of St Margaret in Scotland where he was to develop his skills. When he was released by that guild he came to Ditchling to work for Ethel Mairet.

Like Jones, he had heard of the Guild from Fr John O'Connor; he was to become a member in 1926, the year in which he married. Five of his six children were to become involved in weaving. Eventually the management of the workshop was taken over by his daughter Jenny.

His lasting contribution was to pioneer the revival of gothic style liturgical vestments, designed in a conical shape. Their use has become common to the present day.



Bernard Brocklehurst (1904 - 1996) - Member of the Guild - 1930 - 1941 - Weaver

Brocklehurst joined the Guild as KilBride's partner. When production was suspended in 1940 due a silk shortage, he left the area and did not return. He did however continue to work on liturgical vestments.



Philip Hagreeen (1890 - 1988) - Member of the Guild 1930 - 1955 - Engraver, letterer

Hagreeen was a leading force in the foundation of the Society of Wood-Engravers in 1920; he visited Ditchling 1922, eventually following Gill to Capel y ffin in 1924. He returned to Ditchling as a member of the Guild in 1930 and becoming a member. His lettering continued the tradition established by Johnston and Gill of simplicity and clarity in lettering with his many engraved bookplate designs; he was also a committed distributist. He retired in 1957, but continued to paint watercolours.



Dunstan Pruden (1907-1974) - Member of the Guild 1934-1946; 1968-1974 - Silversmith

Pruden came to Ditchling in 1932 and became a full member of the Guild two years later. His book 'Silversmithing' was printed by St Dominic's Press and became the foundation for his part-time teaching career at Brighton Art College. He fulfilled hundreds of commission for ecclesiastical metalwork and in addition to working in silver and gold he made carvings in ivory.

[Excerpts from unpublished autobiography](#)



Winefride Pruden (1913 -2008) - Member of the Guild 1975 - 1988 - Silversmith, writer

She was taught the art of silversmithing by Dunstan and joined the Guild in 1975. She lectured widely and was the art critic for the Catholic publication The Tablet. A former President of the Society of Catholic Artists she was made one of the first Papal Dames in 1994.

[Obituary](#)



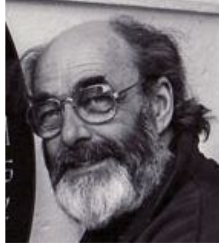
Edgar Holloway (1914 - 2008) member of the Guild 1950 - 1988 - painter, graphic designer, engraver, print-maker,

Edgar Holloway first came to Ditchling from in 1948 with an established reputation for drawing and print making. He learned the art of wood-engraving from Philip Hagreen and became a Guild member in 1950. For the next twenty years he turned away from engraving and concentrated on graphic design, continuing the tradition of fine hand-drawn lettering established by Gill and Johnston. In 1969 he turned to water-colours inspired by the landscapes of Wales and Sussex and in 1972 resumed engraving. He was chairman of the Guild when it closed in 1988. The last twenty years of his his life saw much interest in his work with several retrospectives.

[Obituary](#)

John Skelton (1923 - 1999) - Not a Guild member - Sculptor and lettercutter

Nephew of Eric Gill, he became apprenticed to Joseph Cribb after Gill's death in 1940. In 1942, he joined the Army, was commissioned into the Royal Artillery in 1944, and served in India,



Burma, Malaya and Siam. On his return he worked as a stonemason, married Myrtle Bromley Martin, a silversmith and set up his first workshop at Burgess Hill, Sussex, in 1950. In 1958 the Skeltons moved their home, workshop and studios to Streat, near Ditchling. After his death, his daughter kept up the workshop, preserving the link between Ditchling and stonecutting.

www.johnskelton.org.uk

Jenny KilBride (1948 -) - Member of the Guild 1974 - 1988 - Weaver & Dyer



The daughter of Valentine KilBride, Jenny learnt her skills from her father and in 1974 became the first woman to join the Guild. Having grown up at the Guild she still lives in Ditchling and is Chair of the museum Trustees.

Ewan Clayton (1956 -) - Member of the Guild 1983 - 1988 - Calligrapher



Clayton is the grandson of Valentine KilBride and was the last member to join the Guild in 1982. He currently teaches calligraphy in England and abroad and is Research Professor in the Department of Art at the University of Sunderland. He has curated several exhibitions at Ditchling Museum about calligraphy and typography as well as exhibitions on David Jones and Edward Johnston.

Other members

Philip Baker - 1932-1939 - carpenter - brother-in-law of George Maxwell

Mark Pepler - 1932-1933 - printer - son of Hilary Pepler
Cyril Costick - 1932-1933 - printer
John Maxwell - 1958-1979 - carpenter - son of George Maxwell
Noel Knapp-Tabbemor - 1968-1978 - stonecutter
Kenneth Eager - 1974 -1988 - stonecutter
Thomas KilBride - 1953-1960 - weaver - son of Valentine KilBride

THE GUILD OF ST JOSEPH AND ST DOMINIC

PHILOSOPHY

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The departure point for any discussion of the philosophy of The Guild is generally considered to be the ideas of Eric Gill. He it was who was the first to move to Ditchling and who was throughout his life, a keen polemicist and philosopher.

One major influence on Gill was the Arts and Crafts movement. This began primarily as a search for authentic and meaningful styles for the 19th century and as a reaction to the eclectic revival of historic styles of the Victorian era and to "soulless" machine-made production aided by the Industrial Revolution. John Ruskin was an early philosopher of the movement whose most famous protagonist became William Morris. Gill's immersion in the movement can be dated to 1905 when he moved to Hammersmith and found himself in a circle that included Morris's printer, Emery Walker and Morris's daughter, May. At this time he started to move beyond his core craft of letter cutting to different art forms. It was also at this time that he met Hilary Pepler.

In this movement, Gill found much which he found inspiring, in particular the idea of reuniting the artist and the craftsman, the source of inspiration with the agent of production. Nevertheless, Gill found the Arts and Crafts world less than completely convincing and in 1907 he left Hammersmith for Ditchling, in 1909 he publishing a significant article entitled 'The Failure of the Arts and Crafts Movement'. His concern was that in order for craftsmen to get an economic return, they had to produce goods for the well-healed. This did not appeal to him and he set out to look for different ideas and structures.

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Ditchling appealed as a rural retreat from the world and during this period he converted Roman Catholicism. As the son of a non-conformist minister, religion was an established part of his life, and it would seem he saw greater spiritual possibilities within the Catholic faith. Certainly, in addressing his sexual appetites, he took his theological understanding into areas that were far from orthodox. It has been suggested that his understanding owes something to catholic mysticism, where the relationship between Christ and the church is seen as being comparable to that of bride and groom. Notwithstanding his singular views, his Catholic faith became a central part of his identity and would be key to the development of his ideas.

It is worth recalling that following the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1832, the Victorian era saw a revival of interest in pre-Reformation religious practice and belief, reflected in such intellectual developments such as Gothic Revival in Architecture and the Oxford Movement in the church of England. The notion that the Catholic Church had valid claims to being closer to the early church led to a great many conversions in the late Victorian and Edwardian eras. This appeal would have been keenly felt by an artist such as Gill for whom the recovery of simplicity in life and art was a important ambition.

In 1914, further ideas were brought into play when Gill met Fr Vincent McNabb, a Dominican advocate of Distributism (also known as "Back to the Land") a third-way economic philosophy formulated by such Roman Catholic thinkers as G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc to apply the principles of Catholic Social Teaching articulated by the Roman Catholic Church, especially in Pope Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum.

According to distributism, the ownership of the means of production should be spread as widely as possible among the general populace, rather than being centralized under the control of the state (socialism) or wealthy private individuals (capitalism).

A summary of distributism is found in Chesterton's statement: "Too much capitalism does not mean too many capitalists, but too few

capitalists." Distributism holds that, while socialism allows no individuals to own productive property (it all being under state, community, or workers' control), and capitalism allows only a few to own it, distributism itself seeks to ensure that productive property is owned by worker individually. As Hilaire Belloc stated, the distributive state (that is, the state which has implemented distributism) contains "an agglomeration of families of varying wealth, but by far the greater number of owners of the means of production." This broader distribution does not extend to all property, but only to productive property; that is, that property which produces wealth, namely, the things needed for man to survive.

Distributist thinking concentrated on the formation of these economic principles, seeing only a minimal role for the state and having little to say about systems of governance or the political action necessary to implement its ideas on a national scale. While Distributism has often been described as a third way of economic order between socialism and capitalism, some have seen it more as an aspiration, which has been successfully realised in the short term by commitment to the principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, these being built into financially independent local co-operatives, such as the Guild itself.

These various strands of thought and belief all came together in the decision to form the Guild in 1920. It was to be an example of distributivism in practice, a community of devout Catholic men creating fine goods with their own hands at minimal expense in beautiful surroundings. Its appeal to many skilled craftsmen is not to be wondered at. The First World War had seen the end of Edwardian optimism and, for many, had given rise to the bleak and fractured mindset reflected elsewhere in Modernism. Some though responded by looking for a simpler, more humane way of life and this is where the Ditchling experiment had a great deal of appeal.

One factor that needs to be emphasised is the all-encompassing nature of the Guild's way of life. In included not merely commitment to craft principles but also to the economic and religious ideals and to the principle of agricultural self-sufficiency. All in all it was a

demanding existence for the Guildsmen, and one that could only be lived out with a great sense of purpose.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GUILD.

The Guild is a society of Catholic craftsmen who wish to make the Catholic Faith the rule, not only of their life but of their workmanship and to that end to live and work in association in order that mutual aid may strengthen individual effort.

Supporting themselves and their families by the practice of a craft, the members choose St. Joseph as their patron. Further, having found the Dominican Order their most explicit teachers, they also place the Guild under the patronage of St. Dominic.

The Guild holds;

- That all work is ordained to God and should be Divine worship.
As human life is ordained to God so must human work be. We cannot serve God and Mammon but we can love God and our neighbour. The love of God means that work must be done according to an absolute standard of reasonableness; the love of our neighbour means that work must be done according to an absolute standard of serviceableness. Good quality is therefore twofold, work must be good in itself and good for use. (From 'Actus Sequitur Esse', *The Game*, Sept., 1921).
- That the principle of individual human responsibility being a fundamental of Catholic doctrine and this principle involving the principle of ownership, workmen should own their own tools, their workshops and the product of their work.

The Guild therefore aims at:

- Making the goodness of the thing to be made the immediate concern in work.

- Undertaking and imposing only such work as involves responsibility for the thing to be made.
- Making the good of the work and the freedom of the workman the test of its workshop methods, tools and appliances.

THE RULES.

- Members shall be
 - Practising Catholics
 - Earning their living by creative manual work
 - Owners of their tools and of their work.
- Admission to the Guild shall be by the unanimous consent of the members.
- Applicants for membership who fulfil all conditions for admission shall be postulants for at least one year and shall be known as Qualified Postulants.
- Applicants, such as apprentices, may be admitted to membership who do not yet fulfil the third condition for admission, but shall remain postulants until such time as they are able to fulfil it and shall be known as Unqualified Postulants.
- The approval of the Guild must be obtained for the entrance of any apprentice or employee to a member's workshop and such apprentices or employees must be Catholics.
- A Guildsman may not enter into workshop partnership with a non Guildsman.
- The members shall elect annually a Prior who shall represent

the Guild in all its affairs and superintend the work of such other officers as may be appointed. He shall generally take care that the Constitution be observed.

- There shall be a meeting of the members at least once a month to decide whatever may be required. Postulants shall attend the Guild meetings but without a vote.
- It shall be the Guild's duty to encourage understanding and practice of its principles among its members by arranging occasions for their discussion and exposition.
- Guildsmen shall meet in the Chapel for prayer in common on such regular occasions as may be arranged.
- There shall be a regular Guild subscription for the upkeep of the Chapel and other expenses.
- The Guild owns its land and buildings under the name of the Spoil Bank Association Limited.
- The property is intended for occupation by Guild members and for use for Guild purposes only.
- The Guild shall administer its property through its officers and at its meetings, but the property accounts shall go through the books of the Spoil Bank Association only.
- Membership of the Guild shall include membership of the Spoil Bank Association Limited.

THE GUILD OF ST JOSEPH AND ST DOMINIC

WORKSHOPS

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Introduction



Central to the idea of the idea of the guild was the creation of workshops where workmen could concentrate on achieving the Guild ideals of a close relation with their work, removing the distinction between artist and craftsman and producing artefacts which combined utility with beauty. For Gill, the workshop was an near-sacred space one where "slackness of living and of willing stop at the door".

Each master-craftsman had complete control of his workshop, but the buildings (and the on-site accommodation) were collectively owned by the Guild to whom rent was paid.

This section looks briefly at the six major workshops and studios that were established and thrived under the aegis of the Guild.

Stone carving - Gill, Cribb, Skelton, Eager

Owing to the involvement of Gill, this was the most famous of the Guild's workshops. While he was prolific during his Ditching years, his involvement with many inscription was restricted to initial drawing with the cutting being carried out by Cribb. After Gill left Cribb continued to work in he same tradition, using no power tools and charging for work strictly on the basis of time spent. In style Cribb was close to the medieval with a detectable influence of French and Italian Romanesque. He carved at least 20 sets of the Stations of the Cross during his lifetime.

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The main output of the workshop was church sculpture, inscriptions and tombstones. Cribb himself carved at least 20 sets of Stations of the Cross, some of the most important of the many hundreds of examples of the output of the workshop that survive.

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Woodwork - George Maxwell, Philip Baker, John Maxwell

The carpentry workshop concentrated on church furniture and handmade looms, reflecting the Guild's concern with religion and with traditional crafts. Many examples of this work are still use today, a result of Maxwell's emphasis on honest workmanship which he set out as follows:

"Good material, honestly used together with sound construction is the basis on which all work must be done if it is to give satisfaction in use or to the beholder".

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Printing - Hilary Pepler, Mark Pepler

Pepler used a nineteenth century Stanhope Press in the St Dominic's Press, aiming, like the other Guildsmen, to be a craftsman and not a mechanic. He was opposed to mass production and had no ambition to produce cheap and shoddy work. His printing style was simple and direct avoiding the elaborate decorations that were a feature of Arts and Crafts publishing.

It produced over 200 high quality books or pamphlets, including works by Fr. McNabb, Jacques Maritain, Raïssa Maritain, many illustrated by Gill and the other wood engravers and calligraphers at

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Ditchling such as David Jones, Desmond Chute, and Philip Hageen.

Printing was at the core of the Guild's activities, with the periodical *The Game* being used to articulate and disseminate its philosophy.



Silversmith - Dustan Pruden, Winefride Pruden

The silversmith workshop was established by Pruden, who, like many of the Guildsmen, gained a great many important ecclesiastical commissions.

Possibly the most famous is a gold chalice from the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Liverpool dating from 1959 which bears a wonderful figure of Christ in Majesty and is made from 300 wedding rings donated by widows, making it an extraordinary example of lay piety.

Weaving - Brocklehurst, KilBride family,



Weaving was carried on using traditional means and traditional vegetable dyes. While a range clothing made with wool, silk cotton and linen was offered, the workshops fame rested on its range of clerical garments. These include habits, hair-shirts (designed for maximum discomfort) and vestments. From the sixteenth century, priests had worn heavy richly decorated garments for performing their sacred duties; Brocklehurst and KilBride were to establish a different style, simpler in form and made in plain fabrics with little embellishment. They were designed in a conical shape as seen in medieval brasses and when worn, displays a fine array of folds. This Gothic style, as it became known, is now universally popular.

The workshop received many prestigious commissions including Washington Catholic Cathedral (1960) and Chichester Cathedral (1980).

Pictorial art: painting, etching, engraving, printmaking -



Chute, Jones, Hargreen, Holloway

The combined membership of Hargreen and Holloway spanned almost the entire history of the Guild and encompassed a variety of work. Hargreen earned a reputation as a young man as a portrait painter but on entering the Guild gave this up for wood engraving and ivory carving. Many of his woodcuts were used in the publications printed by the Saint Dominic Press.

Holloway had begun his artistic career as an etcher and had a strong reputation when he arrived at Ditchling; he was taught engraving by Hargreen in 1948 and his work included design cartography and lettering, a theme that ran through the nearly all of the workshops.