THE BARBICAN MURAL

by ROBERT LENKIEWICZ (1941–2002)

Including 'The Witch on the Barbican' *by* John Callow

First published 2022 by White Lane Press

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Robert Lenkiewicz (1941–2002)

With an essay by

Dr John Callow

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Cover: The Barbican Mural in the 1970s.

Back cover: Detail of the mural with Sir Francis Drake in black and gold armour.

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Foreword

When interviewed in later life, Robert Lenkiewicz, with typical self-deprecation regarding his own work, described his monumental, 3,000-square-foot mural adjacent to his studio on Plymouth's Barbican, as 'reasonably skilled but illustrational'. With his vast knowledge of art history, he fully understood that he fell short compared to the highest standards of his heroes with whom he had been obsessed since his early years in The National Gallery, and who had painted vast public art works – Leonardo, Michelangelo and Titian. Stylistically, as in his other paintings of that period, his mural owed more to seventeenth-century Dutch painting and the German Renaissance, as well appropriately to Hans Holbein, Court Painter to Britain's Tudor Age.

Rather than commissioned, Plymouth City Council had granted him permission to produce a public artwork in order to mark the 350th anniversary of the sailing of the Pilgrim Fathers from the nearby Mayflower Steps. Lenkiewicz typically envisioned a far more ambitious work on a meticulously researched theme, charting Elizabethan England's 'Golden Age'. However, as these republished notes make clear, Lenkiewicz saw it in much more ambiguous terms, 'a time of tremendous skills, flights of imagination and great brutalities – a time very much like our own.'

Half a century later, his words seem ever more prescient and the parallels eerily striking: an ageing Queen who had come to the throne before most of her subjects had been born; a schism with Europe; troubles in Ireland, as well as fundamental questions over the union with Scotland; a period of extraordinary scientific and transformative technological progress blurring the lines between science and 'magic'; a country ravaged by persistent plague in an ever-shrinking globe, which was rife with trade wars and ruthless commercial exploitation by a combination of national and privatised interests. 'Privateers' such as Hawkins, Drake, Frobisher and Raleigh were given tacit licence by Elizabeth to roam the High Seas and plunder treasure wherever they could find it. It was the alchemist, scientist and philosopher, Dr John Dee, Elizabeth's court astrologer and the model for Shakespeare's Prospero, who first coined the term 'The British Empire'. Influenced by historian Frances Yates, Lenkiewicz recognised Dee as a pivotal figure in the culture of the Elizabethan Age long before it had become the standard academic view, placing him at the centre of his complex composition.

Most of Lenkiewicz's models were Plymouth residents and for decades it was a noted landmark in the city, loved by locals and high on the list of the West Country's most popular tourist

attractions. It frequently drew a small crowd to a previously neglected corner of The Barbican, attracted by its scale and vivid colour, to gaze up at its epic cast of familiar characters, while jostling to have their photograph taken in front of it. But, inevitably, like the age it portrayed, the mural's dramatic splendour faded, due to the unsuitability of the surface and the materials employed.

This republished book of the artist's original notes with a new essay by cultural historian Dr John Callow will hopefully enable Robert Lenkiewicz's extraordinary mural to gain long-overdue recognition as one of post-war Britain's most remarkable and original public works of art.

Francis Mallett
The Lenkiewicz Foundation
August 2022

Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to local historian Chris Robinson for permission to use photographs and to Plymouth's Kaya Gallery for their support.

Our thanks also go out to Simon Costin at the Museum of Witchcraft & Magic, Boscastle, for permission to use the image of Robert's 'witch bottle'.

Text and images from the 1972 booklet 'Notes on the Barbican Mural' by Robert Lenkiewicz are used by kind permission of The Lenkiewicz Foundation, the UK charity which promotes awareness of the work, ideas and life of the artist.

NOTES ON THE BARBICAN MURAL

by

ROBERT O. LENKIEWICZ

First published in 1972

Opposite: Robert Lenkiewicz standing in front of the Barbican Mural in 1973. To the painter's left is his self-portrait with a begging bowl. (Photo courtesy of the Kanter family).

This section of the mural was printed on the cover of the original 1972 booklet.

Cover Detail:

A collection of contemporary pages from printed books about current philosophical and mystical ideas.

ARTEPHIUS:

His Secret Booke, of the blessed Stone called the Philosophers. London, 1624. Title page, second part of three tracts on alchemy, translated into English by E. Oraondus, p.142.

AGRIPPAE, Henrici Cornelii:

De Occulta Philosophia, in three books. Title page. Cologne, 1533. Also, p. 168, second book, ibid.

DEE, John:

Monas Hieroglyphica, Title page, Antwerp, 1564. Also, small detail from Dee's minutes of the first angelic conference at which Edward Kelley acted as medium. British Museum, Sloane MS 3188, fol. 9. and: design for Dee's 'great sea', ibid. fol. 30.

FLUDD, Robert:

Utriusque cosmi ... historia, Oppenheim, 1619. Illustration of the functioning of the senses. II, i, 217.
Also, Ccorrelation of the 'monochordum mundi' with the elemental, planetary and angelic spheres.
Utriusque cosmi ... historic; Oppenheim, 1617, p.90.

'It is curious to note to what an extent memory is unfaithful, even for the most important periods of one's life. It is this, indeed, that explains the delightful fantasy of history. '

Marcel Duchamp.

NOTE

It is always hoped that any personal statement – particularly those made within certain creative disciplines – conveys itself directly and immediately. The moment that any art form is forced to employ an intellectual carrier pigeon, one suspects the creative and communication structure of the art language. This sort of idea, though the tail-end of the whole European Romantic movement, is still active, and will continue to operate for as long as the essential structure of any art form remains a mystery to those not in the trade, as well as to many that are.

There are natural aggressions towards elitist culture, due more than anything, to the common irritation felt when one has to learn or re-learn something different. The individual that produces a creative item, the structure or implication of which remains outside most people's perception and experience, should nonetheless, be aware of the enormous gap that lies between what he thinks he is trying to communicate, and the persons and circumstances he is trying to communicate with.

It is difficult to see any clear way to bridging this gap, though contemporary art experiments and activities are more aware than ever before of the problem of communication.

What are we trying to communicate? What are we supposed to be communicating? And perhaps above all, when do we succeed to communicate? These are some of the questions that education in all its varied forms should be consistently and usefully reminding us of.

Robert O. Lenkiewicz
Lower Compton, 1972.

PREFACE

The word 'occult' has quite naturally been employed in many evaluations of the metaphysical arena of human experience.

One may search a long time for a book on such a subject that does not combine widely differing patterns of thought into a strange hotch-potch of magical pie.

Familiarity with this literature reveals an amalgam of superstition, fear and credulity, running parallel with complex mystical ideologies. To isolate these features from their social context is an easy temptation as one imbues these ideas with perennial qualities.

Reliable definitions for occult activities fade at the edges and merge into other fields. A traditional magical craft may, for example, vary from one country to another, or a span of twenty years in a single area might change its pattern out of all recognition.

Modern theorists are beginning to demonstrate how embryonic the understanding of such material is. It is becoming clear that the field is so enormous that useful contributions in the future may require computer assistance.

Due to the work of many contemporary researchers certain breakthroughs have been achieved; the Gothic atmosphere that has surrounded these subjects for so long seems now to be making way for greater care and effort.

Acknowledgements

Throughout the duration of the mural project, debts of appreciation have accumulated.

To Brolac and their representatives for the supply of materials.

To the City Council for approval and patience with the plan.

To Mr. Gimminghom for his sympathetic approach to the problems involved.

To Mr. McMullin for permission to paint on his wall.

To the Barbican Association and John Nash.

Above all, however, to Mr. Harry Cooper, without whose experience, common sense, and timing, nothing in this project would have been achieved.

It should certainly be added that I have received many kindnesses from the occupants of the flats immediately opposite the mural.

Robert Lenkiewicz.

I.S.B.N. 0 903516 01 4

The Painter approached those individuals and authorities acknowledged, with a view to covering a wall measuring approximately 3,000 square feet, with a large painting on an Elizabethan theme.

The wall was in poor condition and was carefully prepared over a period of three months . The whole project took roughly ten months, and was completed in July, 1972.

It is to be imagined that a large group of Elizabethan contemporaries numbering a little more than one hundred individuals are walking through an alley flanked by buildings; the whole group is moving rapidly towards the spectator in a dynamic left hand motion.

The theme of the mural concerns itself with metaphysical ideas current in England during the period 1580–1620.

These ideas cover the following activities: Philosophy, Alchemy, Cabala, Ceremonial Magic, the symbolical aspects of poetry, music and art, the cult of melancholy, chivalry, and similar allegorical trends.

It is to be understood that as a survey of this aspect of Elizabethan culture, the mural is limited.

Although the presentation of the theme is subjective, the technique of painting is academic and traditional.

The painting does not pretend to reflect any aspect of present day art theory.

It is hoped that the Painter will have further opportunity for several more mural projects in the City of Plymouth, and that they will be more adventurous in design.

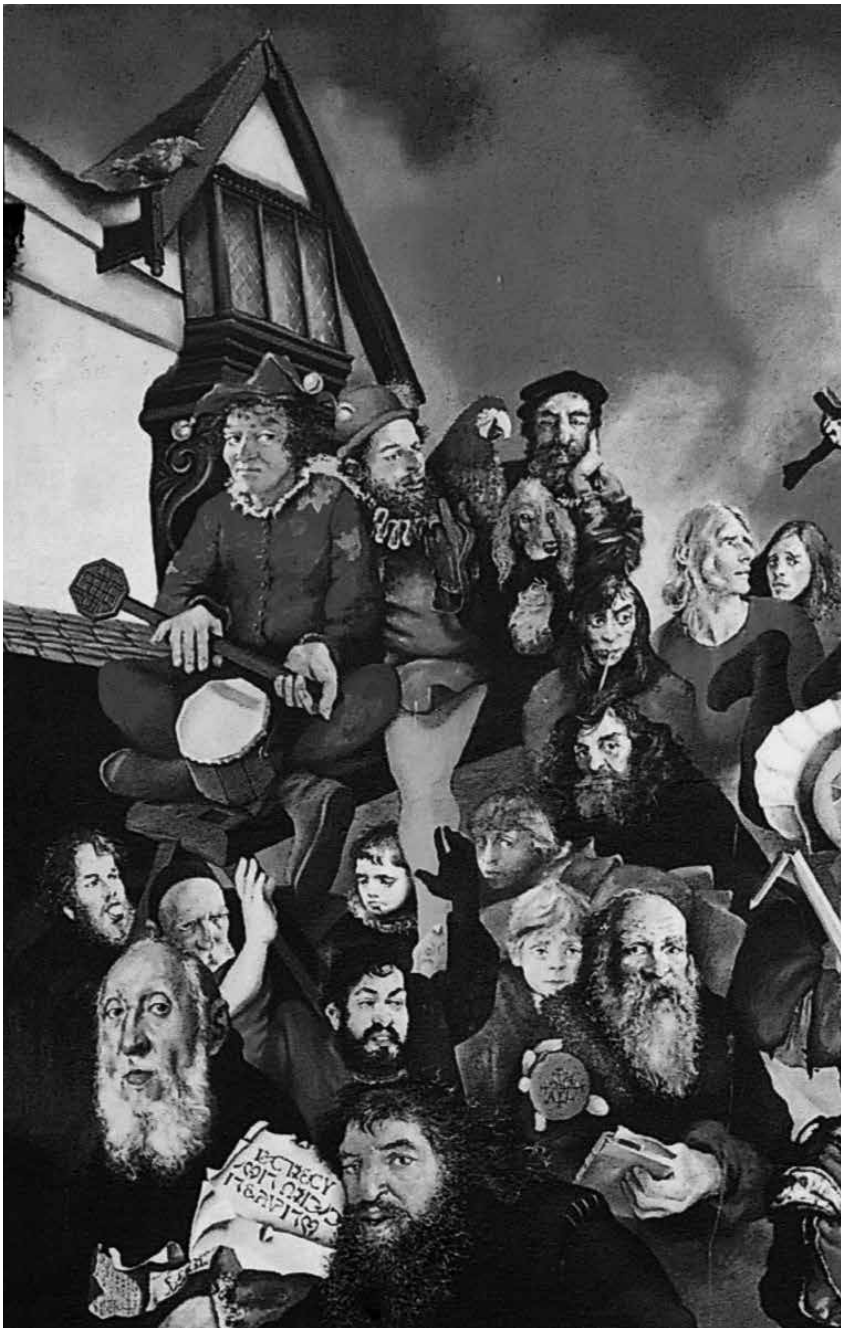
It is intended that the Barbican mural should convey some feeling of the demoniac brilliance of the Elizabethan age, a time of tremendous skills, flights of imaginations, and great brutalities, a time – very much like our own.

The top left of the painting depicts three jesters, Richard Tarlton, Will Kempe and Robert Armin. These three succeeded each other as actors and clowns at the Globe Theatre. They are seated on a raised plank some yards in front of the facade of the Elizabethan House in New Street.

The middle distance figures immediately in front of and below the jesters, are dominated by two individuals, the one on the left being Doctor John Dee, holding some manuscripts with an example of his 'Enochian' alphabet written on one of the sheets, other sections of his papers are taken from diaries and records now at the British Museum. To the right is the figure of Edward Kelley who is holding a wax disc inscribed with a popular Cabalistic symbol, and allegedly part of a table constructed by both Dee and Kelley as part of their attempts to converse with 'angels'.

It would be fairly safe to say that John Dee has been one of the most under-estimated individuals of the Elizabethan scene, and it is only in recent years that his fascinating personality has begun to be reliably studied. There is much evidence for the far-reaching effects of his personal library, activities and interests. And he can certainly be viewed as the hub of the intellectual, metaphysical and possibly economic-political wheel of the Elizabethan Age.

He is a typical example of someone who has been passed by, through not fitting in with the extrovert personality cult of those times.



In front of John Dee can be seen the running figure of Simon Forman, practising astrologer and magician, for all walks of society. Although he is another fascinating individual on whom no useful work has yet been produced, he may be seen as representing a more degraded version of the metaphysical tradition of the age.

He is depicted rushing crudely through a pile of manuscripts representing the more sophisticated aspects of the contemporary mystical thought. Forman holds in his right hand, a diary which he kept containing interesting but almost illegible notes on astrological charts and his own earlier experiences.

Should Doctor Forman continue to run, he would fall over the figure on all fours representing the third doctor in the mural, Doctor Fludd.

Robert Fludd, now buried at Bearsted in Kent, was a practising physician in London who managed to establish for himself a considerable reputation as a philosopher.

His philosophy, however, can in no way be seen as part of the developing 'new science' activities of the times. Unlike that of Francis Bacon or Thomas Hobbes, Fludd's thought was metaphorical to the extreme; it takes as its basis certain observable phenomena of the day, and proceeds to demonstrate the 'personality' of God through his experiments.

He was quite profoundly influenced by a Jewish mystical tradition popularly known as the Cabala, as was John Dee, in a different manner.

Fludd's work – which was prolific – was very well known on the continent, but not in his own country; indeed even today, very few people have heard of him.

Recent studies are again demonstrating that he may mirror his world in an unforeseen way, ranging from descriptions of the magical practices of the Cardinals of Rome, to a possible reproduction of the Globe Theatre, or some of its aspects, in one of his mystical treatises on music.

Behind Simon Forman 's left foot is the figure of Sir Philip Sydney, wearing an armoured breastplate. He is holding manuscripts depicting illustrations from a book published in Frankfurt, and written by Giordano Bruno, the Italian philosopher.

Bruno actually visited England, and was friendly with Sydney. Philip Sydney's own poetry may have been influenced in many subtle ways by the Hermetic undertones of Bruno's interests.

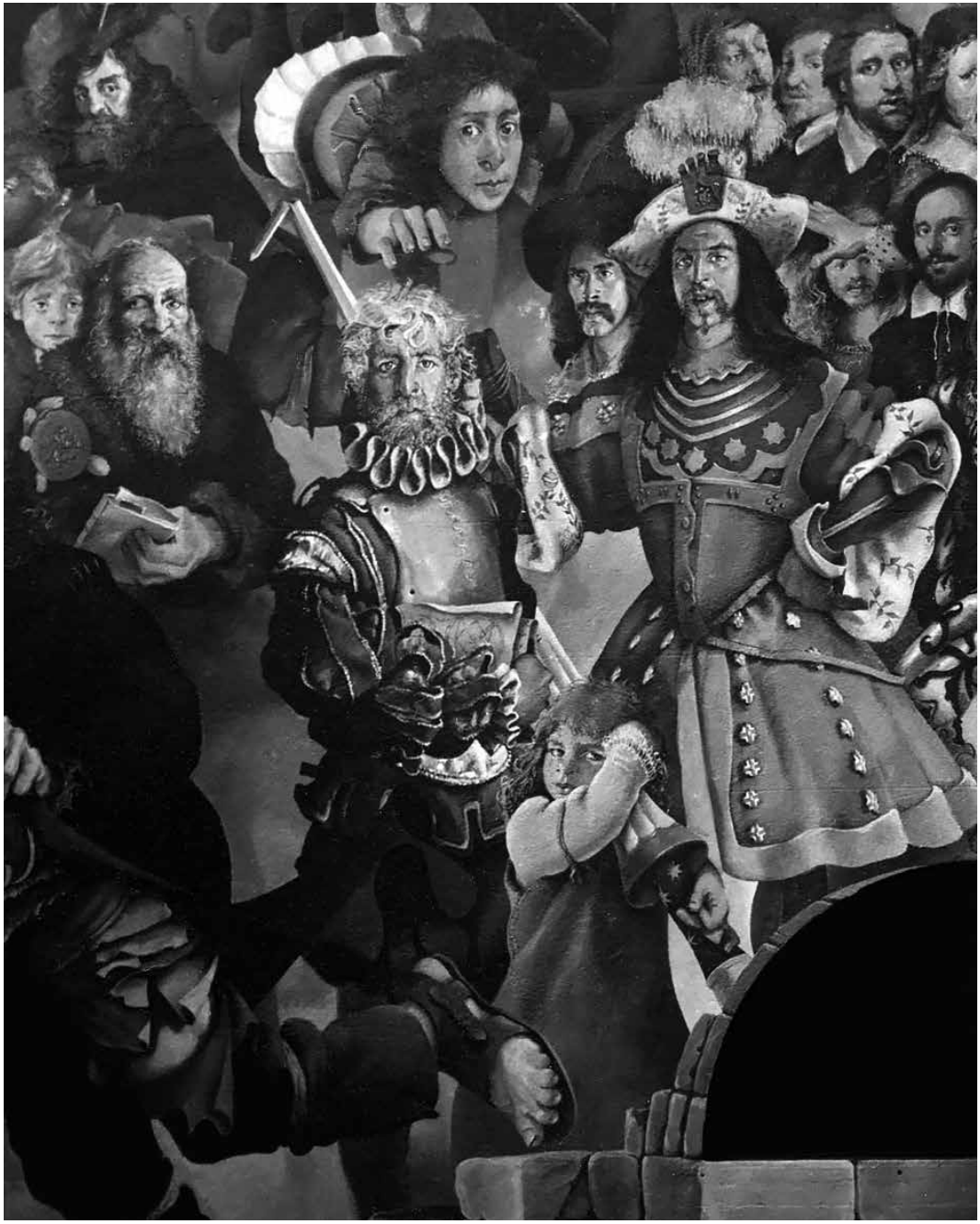
Above Sydney is the flying figure of a mysterious character known as Alexander Seton. Seton was an alchemist from Scotland, who travelled all over Europe demonstrating in ingenious ways, the truth of what was called the Philosopher's Stone.

The colour sequence of Seton's clothing is a typical example of the colour changes allegedly seen in the heated alembic as the 'Stone' was being made. The process usually began with black and ended in some kind of red or magenta.

A very complex symbolism became bound up with chemical experiments in England at this time and earlier. And it now appears to be impossible to unravel the true secrets of the alchemical quest, fascinating though the theories are.

It should not be forgotten that on a more earthly level, Queen Elizabeth herself financed Edward Kelley to change lead into gold in sufficient quantity to pay for her navy.

Kelley's sudden disappearance to the continent at approximately this time, may testify to the success of his experiments.



Above Seton's head is a monk in a cowl carrying a carved wooden crucifix. He is being followed by the devil and a victim of the extraordinary witch mania that was beginning to develop at this time. It was not to be long before witch hunting became a popular pastime and financially lucrative. Even dogs were unable to escape execution as supposed 'familiars' or mediators between the witch and Satan. The silhouetted figure of the animal on the gibbet would have been a common sight, as well as the hangings and tortures of many thousands of people who were in all probability innocent, but trapped by their inability to be articulate, as well as by popular hysteria and exploitation.

Even today nearly four hundred years later, our responses to this sort of subject are identical to the Elizabethan's. And it would not be unreasonable to spread the analogy to the whole gamut of persecution so characteristic of the last three centuries.

Above the gibbet are four flying figures. The central one, a rabbi in a white scarf, screams down at the crowd, much as any member of a persecuted minority might have done. He represents the man who to some extent can see the problem but is inextricably part of it.

The flying figure, with the magenta doublet and hose, holds a bottle containing an homunculus. The homunculus, in this case represented by a king, is part of the alchemical symbolic tradition, related to rebirth and a new life.

Immediately below the gibbet are gathered a group of the more well-known individuals of the Elizabethan age.

Poets like George Chapman, Edmund Spenser, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Francis Beaumont and John Donne.

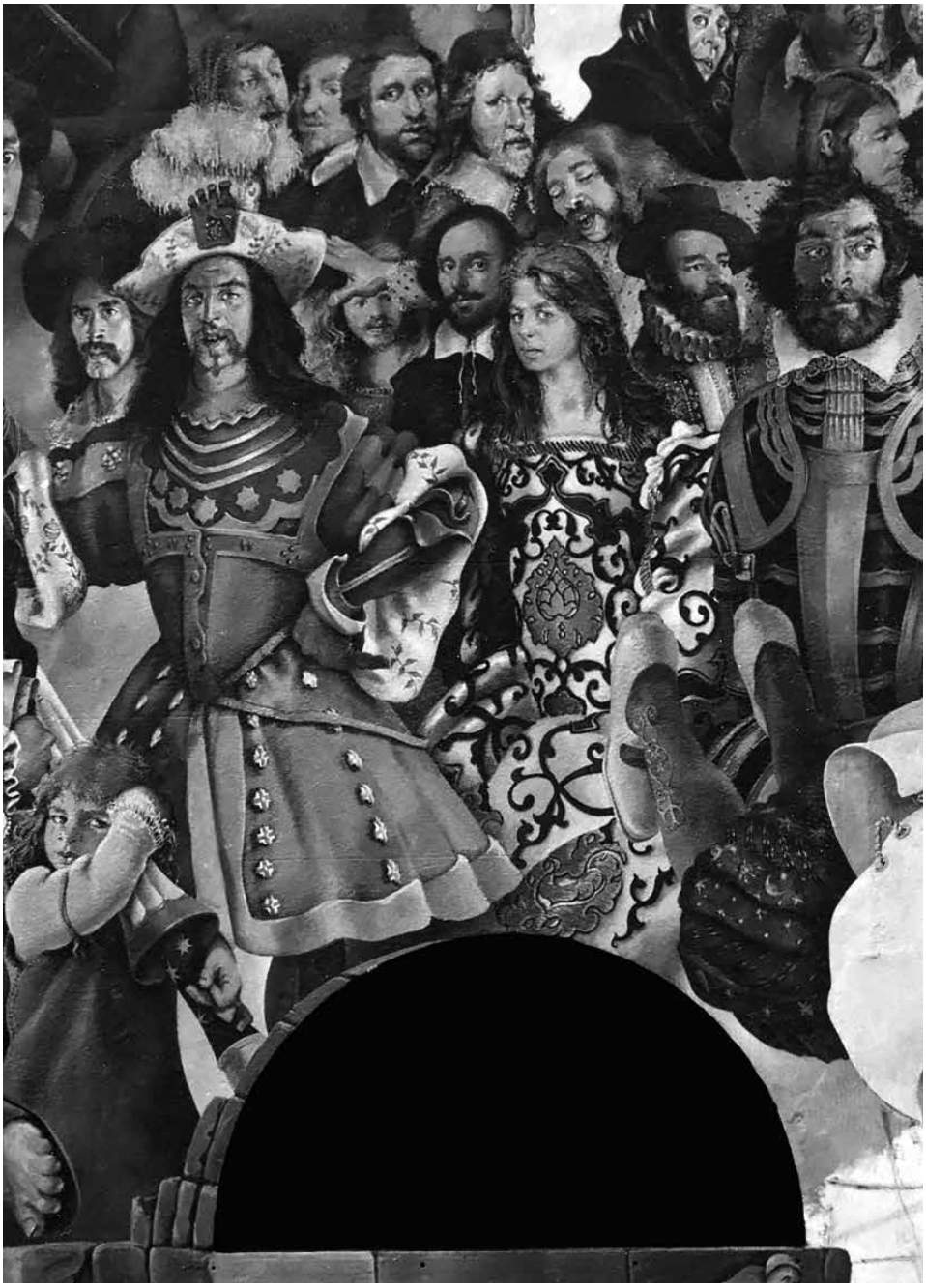
Here also are Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Drake, George Clifford, Third Earl of Cumberland, and Queen's Champion at the Tilt, a strange chivalric activity, with its origins and symbolism stemming from antiquity.

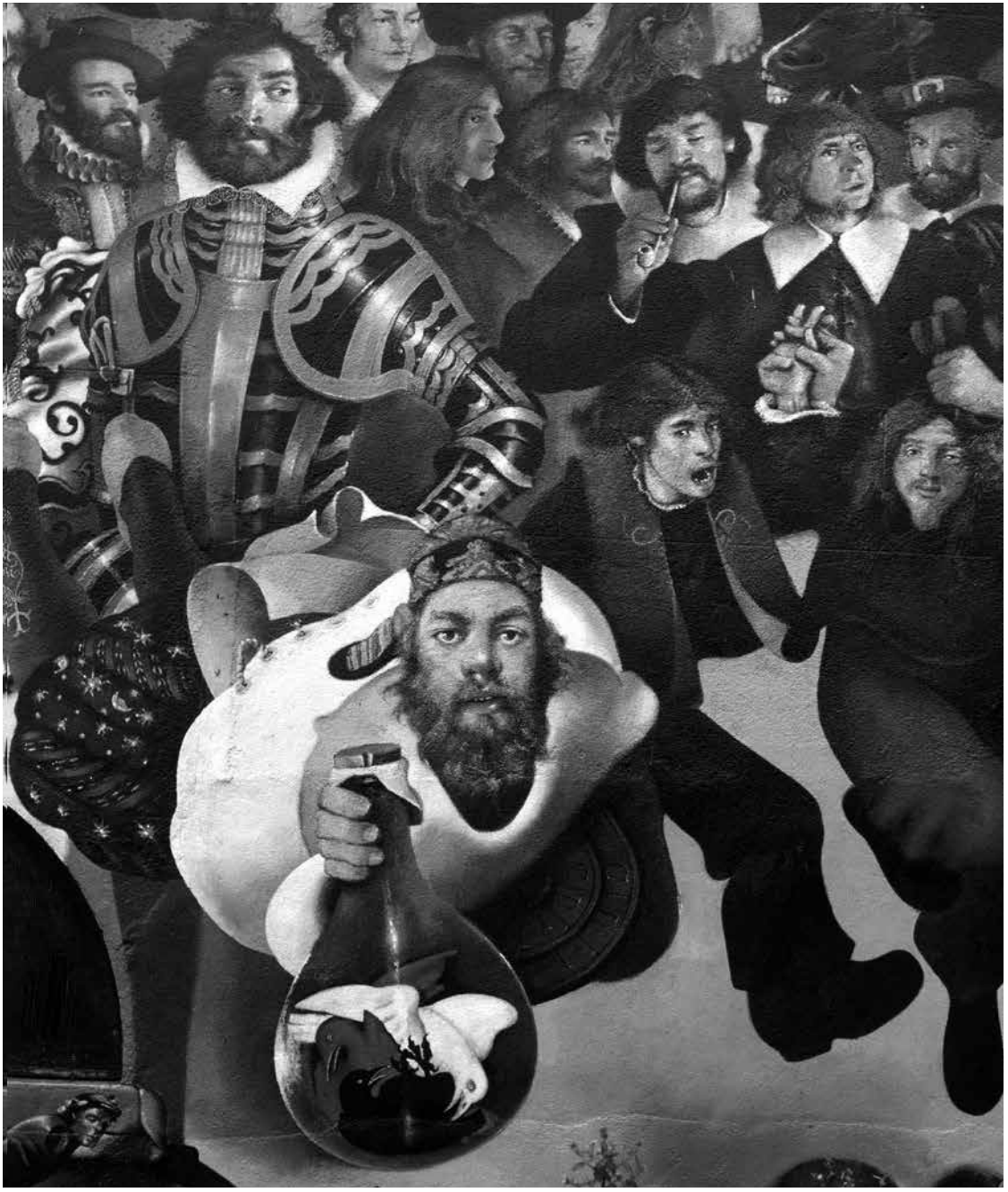
He wears an elaborate allegorical costume, studded with astrological and alchemical imagery. Pinned to his hat is a glove allegedly dropped by the queen, who become the unspoken head of this curious knightly cult.

Clifford's pasteboard shield is to be seen held by the child in the foreground at the bottom right of the painting, and on the shield is typically portrayed the sun, earth and moon.

Below Clifford, a child holds his lance, the tip of which is broken, suggesting the decay of the chivalric order with the death of the Queen.

The figure behind and between Clifford and Drake is that of Lady Frances Howard, the Earl of Suffolk's daughter, who become a client of Simon Forman, whom she paid to supply her with love-potions, in the hope that the King's favourite, Sir Robert Carr, would fix his attentions solely upon her. Part of the intrigue involved the elimination of Sir Thomas Overbury, whose part in the whole affair was one that jeopardised Lady Frances Howard's ambitions. Overbury was poisoned by her in the Tower, with the help of Mrs. Turner, a friend of Forman.





To the right of Drake stands the Third Earl of Southampton, early patron of Shakespeare. Above him are William Sly, Nathaniel Field, and Edward Alleyn, famous actors of Shakespeare's plays and other popular works.

Shakespeare's chief actor, Richard Burbage, stands next to Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones.

Again, flying, below and in front of Drake is Thomas Charnock one of the most curious alchemists of the Elizabethan age. He actually dedicated an alchemical work – now lost – to Elizabeth, and lost the 'secret' on two occasions at least, only finally to regain it. He carries in his right hand a large flask containing three birds, black, white and red, representing the body, soul and spirit according to alchemical symbolism. They also depict the colour change from black to red, being death to knowledge – the symbol of the 'black crow' – putrefaction – one of the few images common to most alchemical treatises.

On his left arm he holds a large wooden wheel, related to an early memory system, derived from the work of Raymond Lully, a Catalan mystic and philosopher.

A little above Charnock can be seen Frobisher with the pipe, and standing near him are four of the major composers and musicians of the Elizabethan period: Thomas Weelkes, Thomas Campion, William Byrd and John Dowland.

Above them is the figure of Queen Elizabeth, wearing the 'virgin' white so characteristic of her later years.

She holds the rainbow as in the famous portrait of her by an anonymous painter. The rainbow is the traditional symbol of peace, as well as a hint to the Queen being the sun.

The flags above her are those indicated in a contemporary watercolour by William Camden of the Queen's funeral.

Below, three leaping figures semi-silhouetted serve to emphasise the demoniac and hysterical undertones of the Elizabethan Age.

At the bottom of the mural is a group of children, (the models for these live in the flats immediately opposite). To the left, lying on the ground and holding a fool's staff, is a figure sleeping, as so many of the Elizabethans seem to do in the laconic paintings of the time.

The sleeping figure alludes to the whole cult of melancholy that permeates the Elizabethan arts. In his left hand he holds a pamphlet disclosing the problems of London crime, and written by the dissolute Robert Greene.

Near him, a man points to contemporary coins, and rests his right hand upon a skull, reminding one of the imminence of death.

The whole composition is based on the shape of the Hebrew letter 'aleph', which according to the Cabala, may imply unity as well as man in relation to the cosmos. The areas coloured green, number only five, and when a line is inscribed, forms the shape of the pentagon, a common geometrical image, and symbol of the 'Golden Section', an allegedly divine proportion that was still being used in architecture and poetry.

The perimeter of the painting is flanked by eight angles forming the shape of the octagon, across which swoops a horizontal curve falling down to where Robert Fludd is portrayed. This line emphasises the impression of figures and movement rushing out of the left hand side of the painting; this tendency, however, is stabilised by the perpendicular line running through the centre of the painting from the top of the rabbi's scarf, down to the fool's staff.

ENDNOTE

In order to maintain the condition of the mural for as long as possible, members of the public are asked NOT to touch the painting at all, and to take extra care over the natural curiosity of their children.

A study entitled, NOTES ON THE ELIZABETHAN ESOTERIC TRADITION, will be published during 1973. This book will deal, in an academic way, with the magical and symbolical thought of the period 1580–1620.

It will be published by The Ferns Publishing Company.

Above: Lenkiewicz himself is the model for this portrait in which 'a man points to contemporary coins, and rests his right hand upon a skull, reminding one of the imminence of death'.

The Witch on the Barbican

An Essay by

John Callow

The Barbican Mural. (Photo courtesy of R. Westlake).

The Witch on the Barbican
An Essay by John Callow

When evening's shadows lengthened across the Barbican, the mural appeared as darkly mysterious: floating figures painted upon the warehouse wall; a cowled monk with a demon at his shoulder; shackled victims of the witch-hunts; the starkness of the gallows hung with the chained corpses of cats; and – above all – the tyranny of oppression registered in the dozens of faces, familiar yet alien, in their Elizabethan garb, enquiring, laughing, and leering at passers-by.

In the summer's sun, it was all very different, a riot of colour and life: less like a civic mural than an illuminated manuscript or a bright tapestry rediscovered after centuries of neglect in a country house. The faces now seemed brightly reassuring: an evocation of England's Golden Age under the first Queen Elizabeth, when science, artistry and maritime endeavour combined under the aegis of Gloriana. For the tourist, or the curious child, the waters that lapped the nearby harbour steps and the breezes that rolled in from the Channel were redolent of that past age, heavy with gun smoke from the Armada fight and the promise of the newly discovered riches of the Indies and the Americas. Plymouth's heritage was there for all to see and to celebrate.

Robert Lenkiewicz – 'The' portrait painter, as the sign above his adjacent studio proudly proclaimed – had set out his stall. A recent arrival in the city, he had not yet achieved the aura of local celebrity that would define his subsequent career, for better or worse, in a love–hate tussle with the people and the place. A young man with a name to make, he lived on his gifts and his wits, thoroughly out-of-love with the fashions, preoccupations, and over-theorisations of the London art world. Tall, imposing, handsome, and charismatic, he demanded attention yet presented more in the way of questions than answers. His art was derided as conservative, out-dated, and reactionary; yet his ideas and lifestyle were profoundly rooted in the counterculture of the late 1960s and early 1970s: fresh, challenging, and free-wheelingly hip. Softly spoken with a polished accent that suggested a background of privilege and entitlement, he was actually the child of Jewish refugees who had fled the Holocaust and kept a rambling guest house in North-West London: an individual who had risen on sole account of his own talents and whose care and concern was invested in the fate of the homeless alcoholics, addicts, and drifters who had washed up, like so much other flotsam and jetsam, in an otherwise loveless seaport. These paradoxes made him, and were expressed, pursued, and explored in the best of his art. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the painting of the Barbican Mural.

When interviewed a decade or so after its completion, Lenkiewicz described his works as exercises in 'giving shape to mystery' and this sense of the esoteric, creative impulse – combined with a healthy dose of ambition and his acquisitive, magpie-like nature – coalesced around the physical space of Plymouth's

The bare wall of the former gin bottling plant in The Parade on Plymouth's Barbican. The chimney of the Plymouth Gin Distillery can be seen behind, 1969.

The Portrait Painter studio and the Barbican Mural in progress in 1972.

Barbican. He loved its ambience, sense of freedom and danger, and the opportunities presented by its spacious walls that seemed to beg to be filled with his bright and challenging images. It was an area that had emerged remarkably unscathed from wartime bombing and the ravages of post-war city planners, and which retained its Tudor street patterns together with a number of high status buildings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that had originally been built as homes for the city's more prosperous merchants and sea captains. Sir Francis Drake had owned two properties near the waterfront, while William Parker, another privateer turned city benefactor, owned the nearby 'Merchant's House'. A stone's throw away from Lenkiewicz's studio, the 'Elizabethan House' on New Street had been newly-built at the time of the Armada and by 1613 was under the ownership of Richard Brendan, the Borough Treasurer. Opened as a museum, in 1930, restored and refurnished to its Tudor appearance, its parlours leaning out over the street, it was a hardy survivor and reminder of the past that stirred the creative imagination of the artist, begging to be captured and cast as the backdrop to a major work. With its narrow lanes, lofty gabled houses and solid half-timbering, the Barbican was designated as Plymouth's first conservation area in 1967 – just a year after Robert's arrival in the city – and was contrasted favourably in the pages of the underground press with the 'windy concrete jungle of shoddy new buildings' that dominated Plymouth's civic centre. By the turn of the 1970s, the working-class hub centring on the Barbican's fish market and fishing industry was being supplemented by an influx of youthful hippies who coalesced around The Dolphin pub, Ronnies' rock club, and the nearby Arts Centre with its theatre, cinema nights, live music and poetry. The result was a flourishing counterculture built around a particular quarter of a city, which was small enough to ensure that everyone knew one another but of sufficient size to support the book, record, clothes, and food shops that provided the burgeoning scene with interest and purpose.

The direct U.S. intervention in the Vietnam War was over but the oil crisis had not yet taken hold, and while glitter and stacked heels had replaced tie-dye and Afghan coats as the de rigueur shopping items on London's King's Road, the effects of the counter-culture, born in the late 1960s, were still rippling out to the English provinces and to cities like Plymouth, threatening to overturn the drab conformist culture of the shires, rooted in church, public school and fading imperial grandeur. In almost every sphere of life – whether the political, sexual or religious – the old certainties were being challenged. Nowhere was this more in evidence, in South-West England, than in Lenkiewicz's studio. It provided a Bohemian meeting place for both the liberated young and for the alienated old: the assorted and fluctuating population of the homeless whom Robert collected as assiduously as his rare books, and who often watched over his shop for him while he was away running errands, securing commissions, or pursuing liaisons with members of the opposite sex.

The studio, at No. 25 The Parade, had once served as a little fruit and vegetable shop run by Jack Nash's family and, immediately prior to Lenkiewicz's tenancy, had been home to the Pilgrim Pottery Studios,

Robert Lenkiewicz in front of the Barbican Mural in 1979. (Photo courtesy of J. Bremer).

settling an artistic reputation upon that corner of the Barbican. The Parade, itself, was built on land reclaimed from the sea in the 1570s, and – as its name suggests – it was used as a drill square during the seventeenth century. Two centuries on, it comprised a granite Georgian custom's house, a range of warehouses, a paved car park and brutalist council flats. There was little reason to lead the visitor to explore this rather drab and uninviting spur of the quayside. However, Lenkiewicz was quick to appreciate the dramatic potential offered by the 3,000 square feet of bare, Victorian warehouse wall that adjoined his property together with the wide expanse of the flag-stoned Parade that stretched out before it like a blank vista, denuded in the early 1970s, unlike today, of trees and vegetation. It was a tempting project: an enormous modernist amphitheatre, formed not of canvas but of concrete fronting onto the crumbling brickwork of the north wall of McMullin's furniture store, that called out to be worked upon, filled, and refashioned into a thing of colour and beauty. And, in 1971, Robert Lenkiewicz was in need of an ambitious civic project in order to grab attention and make his name.

His Rabelaisian lifestyle had already got him into serious trouble when, in 1970, his scheme to fund his studio, his bibliophilia, and the homeless people he supported, through the theft of rare books from the City Library's Cottonian Collection, had landed him with a brief jail sentence. Therefore, the creation of an eye-caching public mural seemed to offer the opportunity to garner positive attention, publicise his workspace, and to restore both his fortunes and his image in the city. As a result, inspired by his surroundings and drawn to the vibrancy and mutability of an age that knew precious little freedom but a great deal of licence, he began work on gathering research materials on the personalities, costumes, weapons, and armour of the Elizabethan and Jacobean courts. Knights of the Garter competed for space, in his notebooks, with Yeomen of the Guard, Quarterstaff-Men, heralds and courtiers, while the faces of the Virgin Queen, based upon her 'Rainbow Portrait', William Shakespeare, Francis Bacon and Ben Jonson – surrounded by comprehensive, descriptive notes and aide-memoire – were meticulously copied from original portraits in The National Portrait Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum and the Ashmolean. There were studies of horse armour, weaponry, coin designs, heraldry and of Elizabeth's royal seal, together with costumes from the court masques of Inigo Jones and notes on the Greenwich armour, once owned by William Somerset, the Third Earl of Worcester, that would be used – in the finished mural – to encase the glittering figure of Sir Francis Drake. Dozens of sketches in pencil, pen and India ink were things of beauty in their own right, testament to his energy and the power of his distinctive vision, revealing of his consummate gifts as an illustrator blessed with a real talent for original historical research. Indeed, some of these studies were, later, sold in his shop in order to help fund the painting of the Elizabethan mural. Nothing went to waste as, for once, Lenkiewicz, the perennial scourge of all forms of authority – and of Plymouth councillors and civic planners, in particular – played his hand astutely in gaining the necessary official approval for the project.

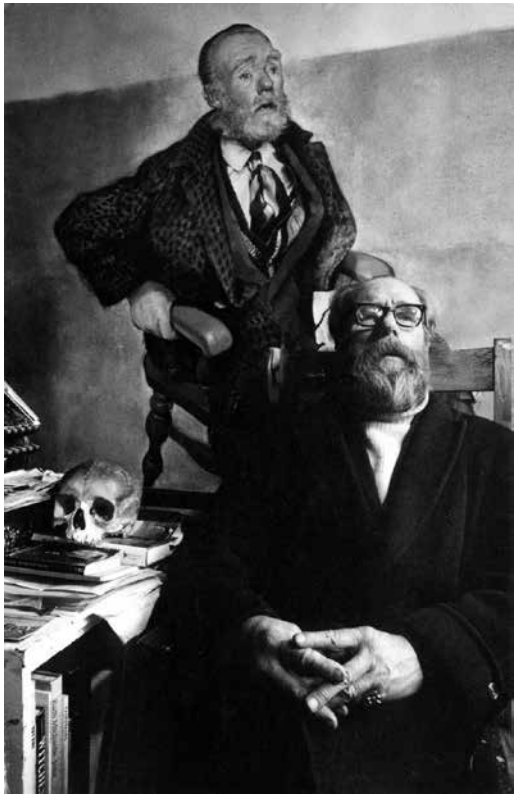
Robert Lenkiewicz with the Barbican Mural in progress in 1972. Note the incomplete central female figure, just above the scaffold planks, faces to her left and was based upon Monica Quirk in this early version. She was subsequently repainted as Robert's new favourite, Pat Parker.

At a time when Britons were still being encouraged to think of themselves as 'New Elizabethans' and in a city which would come to define itself in precisely those terms, his presentation to Plymouth's planning committee on a projected mural celebrating 'Elizabeth and Her Heroes', assured a hearing and was particularly well pitched. The initial study shown to councillors, in the spring of 1971, had been a relatively conventional, illustrative rendering of the Queen and courtiers as a mounted cavalcade, with her Champion, the Earl of Cumberland, Philip Sidney and Walter Raleigh figuring prominently amid a display of heraldic banners and soldiery, that echoed Rembrandt's *Night Watch*. Such a vision was calculated to appeal to local pride in the Armada fight and, more generally, to a vision of the cultural and intellectual richness of the Elizabethan world that came straight out of school text books, and the popular histories of J.A. Froude and A.L. Rowse. It emphasised the achievements of the age as being the driving force in England's rise as a world power laying the foundations – in terms of naval power, mercantile trade, and imperial ideology – of what would later become the British Empire.

These familiar and patriotic themes certainly appealed to the council and, while the artist would never tire of criticising other politicians and local government officers, he was surprised to find that his encounters with Mr C.C. Gimingham, the City Planning Officer, and Councillor Harry Cooper were both productive and amicable. Far from being dull-time servers who could be expected to dismiss anything that smacked of Bohemianism, change, and innovation, out of hand, Lenkiewicz found them to be intelligent, enlightened, and highly supportive of his own creative endeavours. To his credit, the artist was unstinting in his subsequent praise of their generosity, 'common sense' and progressive vision. They certainly agreed with him that the chosen site for the project had suffered from neglect and that its crumbling, graffiti covered walls could only be improved by the installation of an enormous, colourful mural, which might encourage tourists to stray further along the Barbican and help reinvigorate the area's economy.

With the necessary permissions granted, Lenkiewicz started work upon the mural at the start of June 1971, erecting scaffolding and covering the warehouse wall in giant tarpaulins that made it difficult for locals and passers-by to see what was going on behind them, adding a sense of excitement and mystery to the project as it unfolded and subsequently as the drapes were removed, bit-by-bit, upon the completion of fresh sections of the painting. A ready supply of paint was obtained from a Bristol-based company, John Hall & Sons, in return for free advertising, while advice was sought on how best to stabilise and damp-proof the surface with a chemical primer. Robert's children – Alice and Reuben – joined the little band of helpers engaged in mixing the paints and rendering the wall, and were sketched by their father as figures for inclusion in the finished work: Alice in a smock, carrying the Earl of Cumberland's shattered lance, and Reuben holding a shield bearing an alchemical symbol of a sun and a moon. The sense of theatre was re-inforced as the artist's models – often costumed for the part – stood, or sat, on the scaffolding while Robert painted them, and crowds gathered beneath. Philip Stokes, who would later do much to record

During Plymouth's 350th Mayflower anniversary Lenkiewicz was commissioned to paint a large mural for the foyer of The Mayflower Cinema in 1970, which depicted the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World in 1620.



'Bishop' – the vagrant Albert Fisher – sits beneath his portrait in 1973.

A portrait of Bishop as a sleeping figure, a metaphor for melancholy, and clutching a fool's staff, is situated at the base of the mural (see p.28).

Robert's life, struck a pose – in ruff, sash, and cuirass – as Sir Philip Sidney; Robert's friend and long-suffering landlord, Jack Nash, capered in the part-coloured silks of a court jester; while the central female figure – her ethereal beauty framed by the bulk of Cumberland and Drake – was initially modelled upon Reuben's mother, Monica Quirk, before being eclipsed by (and repainted as) Pat Parker, Robert's most recent lover. Naturally enough, many of the regulars at Robert's studio and The Dolphin sat as models for the mural, and their faces – those of local hippies, willowy buskers, and the homeless, such as Albert Fisher (known as 'Bishop') – began to displace the portraits of the historical characters originally scheduled for inclusion in the work. Lenkiewicz described Bishop as: 'an extraordinary man with large hands and a great red beard who cultivated a posh Oxford accent. He would sleep beneath a tree in Stoke Damerel graveyard and believed himself to have mystical experiences'.

In this way, the Barbican Mural became a lasting memorial to the countercultures of both Elizabethan ages – of the 1580s and the 1970s – with the politics and people of one time becoming analogous with the other. Thus, the fashions and strict periodisation of Elizabeth's reign, painstakingly recorded in Robert's notebooks, became blurred and stretched to the late 1630s in order to fit the aesthetics of a new Bohemianism. Instead of the close crops and rugged beards, the homespuns and high ruffs of Elizabethan England; the long hair, silks, falling bands (lace collars) and plunging necklines were more akin to the image presented by the first Caroline court. As Alice Lenkiewicz, perceptively recalled, the 'women were like pagan princesses and the men were like Cavaliers'. It was, she thought, 'a time of fun and excitement', of luminosity and adventure, with her father presiding in the role of 'magician' and 'friendly ogre' over a constantly shifting cast of 'beautiful women and characters and intellectuals, young, old, academic, everyone mingling in this one corner of the Barbican', as part of 'a kind of magical and alchemical chaos'.

At times the chaos threatened to become general, as Robert's accessibility and reputation as something of a 'soft touch' among the homeless led to confrontations on the scaffolding. Reuben remembers his father, beseeched for money, hurling a fist-full of pennies down to the ground, while on another occasion 'a psychotic guy' started up the ladder intent on harming the artist and was only deterred when he was brought crashing down to earth when buckets of paint, and something worse, were tipped over him. Yet, even these jarring encounters served to influence the development of the mural and seemed to fit with the themes of inversion, carnival, and misrule that centred upon the Harlequinade, and which Robert had been exploring since the turn of the decade. Indeed, his first Plymouth studio, in Clifton Street, had been named The Fool, partly in honour of Enid Welsford's eponymous book that had deeply influenced the artist, partly through puckish self-deprecation, and – more importantly – as evidence of his deep engagement with the popular culture of sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe.

To this end, sketches of running, tumbling, drumming and dancing figures; together with a 'Whirling Dervish', jesters, stilt-walkers, troupes of actors, and comedians, were quickly added to the array already intended for inclusion on the wall. The finished work was shot through with a healthy sense of fun and

" Embarkation "

On the 6th of September 1620, in the Mayoralty of Thomas Townes
After being "kindly entertained and courteously used by divers
friends there dwelling", the Pilgrim Fathers sailed from Plymouth
In the Mayflower, in the Providence of God to settle in New Plymouth
And to lay the Foundation of the New England States.

This edition is limited to two hundred prints, each signed by the artist.

Published by :
JOHN NASH
24 The Parade, The Barbican, Plymouth
15th April, 1970

From an original drawing by the artist :
ROBERT LENKIEWICZ
Plymouth, Devon

A limited edition print illustrated by Lenkiewicz and published by Jack Nash in 1970, the 350th anniversary of the sailing of the *Mayflower* from The Barbican.

iconoclasm. A rough hand moved to snatch the hat – distinguished by Queen Elizabeth's gloved favour – from the Earl of Cumberland's head. The broken figurative carving on the fool's staff borne by a somnolent Albert Fisher (another of Robert's homeless friends) is shown baring its arse to the world, while underneath an array of jesters, another of Lenkiewicz's cronies pokes out his tongue. The learned alchemist, Dr Fludd, is pushed to the ground by the onrush of the crowd; and the artist, himself, is portrayed crawling up out of a subterranean cellar, shaking a begging bowl at the passers-by, his eyes appealing for their notice and favour.

On a more subtle and far gentler level, the kindnesses that Robert received from the occupants of the council flats, located directly opposite his studio, was returned through a carefully observed and touchingly executed study of the estate children that fills the whole bottom right corner of the old warehouse wall. Pleasingly, these images of children long-since grown into adulthood, and now in their middle-age, remain the best preserved, today. Their inclusion within the painting did much to garner local support for the project and helped ensure that, whatever art critics thought of Robert Lenkiewicz, he was valued and often loved by the working people who lived alongside him and his works.

As a result of these radical and unexpected departures in content and form, the original remit of the mural as a strictly historical epic rooted in Plymouth's seafaring past began to subtly shift and grow in its scope. No longer simply illustrative, and increasingly sceptical about the mythologising of the reign of Elizabeth I, the mural began to reflect Lenkiewicz's guiding passions: a delight in carnivalesque mischief-making, a deep interest in witchcraft, and his engagement with Jewish mysticism. We can unravel each of these strands in turn.

Lenkiewicz's scepticism stemmed from his wide reading, his undeniable sympathy for the underdog, and his attention to original, historical sources. He had already painted a large mural for the foyer of The Mayflower Cinema, in 1970, which depicted the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers in the New World. The original *Mayflower* had, of course, set sail from the Barbican in 1620, and Lenkiewicz – on the topical 350th anniversary – had expended considerable time and effort in researching the voyage and its impact upon the indigenous peoples of the Americas. As a consequence, his sympathetic and nuanced representation of the Native American civilisations encountered in the New World by the settlers was ground-breaking in terms of its understanding and attention to detail when dealing with costume, physiognomy, and the transmission of cultural values. Ironically, given that Lenkiewicz's artistic reputation was marred, both during his lifetime and long after it, by sneers that he was technically able but an essentially clichéd artist, his historical murals were anything but hackneyed. His depictions of seventeenth-century life, and its civic, mercantile, and religious endeavour, were both accurate and stunningly beautiful, satisfying both the head and the heart, while his drive to create accurate renderings of Native Americans stood outside the colonial tropes that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, still dominated mainstream Brit-

Above: Robert Lenkiewicz with Pat Parker, one of the models for 'the witch on the Barbican', Lady Frances Howard, in 1973.

Above right: a 'witch bottle' owned by Robert. Witch bottles, which date to the seventeenth-century, were counter-magical decoys, designed to attract malicious spells aimed at the owner. By placing something of themselves – like a lock of hair – in the bottle, it was hoped that evil spirits and magical attacks would strike the wrong target. (Photo courtesy of the Museum of Witchcraft & Magic, Boscastle.)

Right: Terry Goldstone in 1973. Lenkiewicz used his friend and sometime landlord Terry Goldstone as a model for Sir Francis Drake.

ish academic historiography, the media, and popular culture. The result was the gentle subversion of the foundation myth of the USA and one that, when allied to the sense of inversion present in his reworking of the Harlequinade and the figure of the Jester or Fool, fed directly into the Barbican Mural, itself. Thus, the work on the warehouse wall began to turn away from a simple vision of Gloriana and her gallants and began, instead, to engage with the intellectual – as opposed to the strictly military – currents which proved to be the true glory of her age.

In particular, Lenkiewicz was fascinated by witchcraft and magic as intellectual systems. Since the mid-1960s he had been interested in revived witchcraft, reading Frazer's *Golden Bough* and Gardner's *Witchcraft Today*, practising the Tarot and exploring Idries Shah's magical recasting of Sufism. By the early 1970s, he was performing rituals – both public and private – and had established what would become a long-term friendship with Cecil Williamson, the founder of the Museum of Witchcraft and Magic at Boscastle, in Cornwall. He painted three witchcraft scenes as commissions for the museum, depicting an initiation, a witch with a homunculus, and the summoning of an incubus; and when he came to paint the portrait of his then wife, Celia Mills – in a canvas which arguably stands as his first major work – he emphasised not only the passage of time but the figure of the woman he loved as a witch. She is captured, fully absorbed, in the act of working cord magic, running her fingers through the strands of wool in practice for the type of spell that Bel Mooney would see Robert, himself, perform before a Plymouth audience, in 1973.

It was perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that Lenkiewicz should choose to reconfigure the purpose and design of the Barbican Mural in order to create a massive cryptogram 'portraying the vitality and mysteries of the Elizabethan age', taking into account the passage of the sun and shadows across its surface, and configured around the swirl of the Hebrew letter Aleph, the first letter of the word for 'Truth' inscribed upon the brow of Rabbi Loew's mythical golem. The 'truth' that underpinned the painting was not that of the Elizabethan state as it attempted to conquer Ireland and the trade routes of the Caribbean, but systems of esoteric thought based around the Kabbalah that had given rise to experiments in alchemy, magic, and misrule. If Elizabeth watched from the side lines, then it was the motley collection of explorers, playwrights, and alchemists who stood centre stage as the true motors of societal change, and the figure of a witch – Frances Howard – whose gaze commanded and inspired them all.

For many of her contemporaries, Frances Howard represented all that was worst in the vice-ridden Jacobean court. Her infidelities and her ambition had appeared boundless, as she humiliated and attempted to ruin her stolid and brave soldier husband, the Third Earl of Essex, and was tried for the murder of Sir Thomas Overbury, a servant of the Crown, who stood between her and the man she desired. The Earl of Cumberland's broken lance, which transects Lenkiewicz's Barbican Mural, could as easily refer to Essex's impotence – allegedly visited upon him through his wife's witchcraft – as to the degradation of chivalry

with the coming of firearms and mercantile power. It is Frances Howard's beauty, self-awareness and overt sexuality that Lenkiewicz chose to celebrate through his work: recasting her image and painting not her own face and figure but that of his lover, Pat Parker, as a symbol of glamour and bewitchment. The fact that the casual observer would not automatically associate her figure with that of an accused historical witch, or that her contemporary doppelgänger could be found in Robert's studio upon the Barbican, added a further layer of mystique to the composition, with each figure suggesting both a literal and a hidden – or occult – significance.

As it was, the pride, wealth, and exalted social status protected the real Frances Howard from associations with witchcraft and her escape from the gallows owed far more to her family connections than her innocence or even what was undoubtedly a spirited defence. For those of her sisters without such privileges, the reality of witchcraft allegations was a far briefer and more brutal affair. Lenkiewicz, from his intensive reading of witchcraft sources, which bordered upon the compulsive, was well aware of this and sought to contrast the theories of the elites with the popular experience of magic and persecution. Thus, a gibbet, hung with the corpses of dogs – strung up as suspected familiar spirits – dominated the top of the wall, in the finished mural. A cowled monk carrying a crucifix, followed by a devil (both copied from an early sixteenth-century engraving by Urs Graf), force their way through the crowds, leading a half-naked man, writhing with his arms pinioned behind his back, and a plump doe-eyed blonde – a portrait of Ivorine McLaren, mother of Robert's son Dorian – still incredulous on her way to execution. Below them, an older witch seeks comfort in the arms of a pert little demon, another familiar spirit, who seems dismissive of her but intent on the motions and mischievous form of Alexander Seton, one of the many alchemists painted into the scene. This demon clearly valued the acquisition of some souls more than others.

Lenkiewicz was in no doubt that 'witch mania' was a form of obsessive behaviour and the result of individuals conceding 'their lives for an idea': an idea which, in the Early Modern period, was gaining ground among intellectual elites and appeared as 'daemonology', a new pseudo-science. That the Elizabethan – rather than the Medieval – age gave rise to the witch-hunts and that Shakespeare stood as the great propagator of witch belief in his plays, was not lost upon the artist. The Elizabethan 'golden age' was one shot through with a darkness born of religious fanaticism. What particularly enthralled Lenkiewicz was the root cause of this fanatical behaviour, 'whatever form it takes. It could be alcoholism, heroin addiction, ideological or political systems, or 'falling in love''. Witchcraft was a clear example of such fanaticism and the artist's sympathy with the disadvantaged and the underdog – the alcoholics, obsessives, the homeless, and drug addicts – led him naturally to an appreciation of the witch and of the 'vibrant ... violent [images that] dealt with male domination and ... smacked of the same kind of fanaticism that one sensed in the Malleus Maleficarum [the witch hunter's handbook] and the witchcraft phenomenon, which can be seen nowadays as the history of male violence against women'. In this way, he thought that his mural, and the

arts in general, could 'offer one of the only means of developing skills to help us live in the shadow of infinite black space' formed from ignorance, intolerance and fanaticism. The inclusion of witchcraft within the mural was not, therefore, an eccentric whim but an acknowledgement that 'the science of witches' – as propagated by King James VI and I in both his Scottish and English kingdoms – was an integral part of the intellectual life of the period. Similarly, the parallels between the victims of one age (namely poor women recast as witches) and the victims of another (the addicts and the homeless of the 1970s) were registered by his inclusion of so many of Plymouth's down-and-outs in the composition, doubling for the Elizabethan 'great and good'. Lenkiewicz was holding a mirror to both Elizabethan ages and the reflection was not always flattering, suggesting that in both 1588 and 1970 there was more that smacked of rust than of gold.

The division between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' was also explored through the distinction in the mural between forms of High and Low Magic: contrasting the activities of the village witch through charms and curses, with the lofty aims of the alchemist and the magus who aimed at power and the perfection of the human soul. Consequently, Lenkiewicz's days became filled with trips up to London – to the British Museum and Library – in order to sketch John Dee's seal and scrying stone, and to take notes from the works of his favourite occultists, Corneluis Agrippa, Artephius and Robert Fludd. His sketchbooks came to be filled with copies of alchemical symbols, images of rabbis, would-be magicians and 'Yorkshire witches and imps', culled from the pages of Aristotle, Ramon Lull and from Edward Fairfax's *Treatise on Witchcraft*. Soon he was telling his friends and the local media, that the completed mural would 'represent a limited period of Elizabethan [and actually Jacobean] culture from 1580 to 1620, the philosophy, the poetry, the music and, above all, the magic, the witchcraft and the alchemy of the time'. He would go even further and give the mural an alternative title, styling it as 'The Influence of Jewish Thought on Elizabethan Culture, 1580–1620', in a dramatic break with the original theme centred upon English national pride and identification with the monarchy. Thus, the fully realised mural owed a profound debt to Lenkiewicz's own Jewish heritage and sustained an argument that Kabbalistic thought was vital to the development of alchemical thought in the West.

Viewed in this way, Elizabeth's England was no longer an isolated 'scepter'd Isle' but an integral part of Europe and the wider world, the home to immigrants, open to the transference and transmutation of cultural values, and deeply indebted to the Jewish people for the inspiration that fired Shakespeare, Marlowe, Donne and Spenser. The figure of the Rabbi, therefore, presides overall, hovering above the other figures: physically detached of necessity, as save for a handful of Portuguese merchants, there were no Jews in England between Edward I's edict of expulsion, in 1290, and Oliver Cromwell's readmission of the community in 1656. However, it is his intellectual impact, rather than the physical presence, which interests the artist. His Rabbi wears an enormous white scarf, which unravels like the scrolls of the Torah, flapping

in the wind, his words of wisdom, toleration, and enlightenment lost upon the crowd that mills below. If the muses had alighted temporarily upon the England of Shakespeare, then, the painter reminds us, they would soon shift their focus to the Bohemia of Rabbi Loew and the Holland of Baruch Spinoza.

Aside from the Rabbi, the only other figures to fly are the alchemists. One circles the Rabbi, holding a kingly homunculus captive in the bottle at his side. Thomas Charnock looms out of the mural towards the viewer, proffering a phial containing three dead birds, one black, one white and one red, symbolising the progressive transmutation of consciousness through death to true knowledge. A similar colour change is registered in the clothing of the figure of Alexander Seton, who floats impishly above the head of Sir Philip Sidney. At the left of the mural, John Dee and Edward Kelley are depicted, flanking Simon Forman. Dee is plump, inscrutable and aged, clutching his manuscripts written in his 'Enochian' script, which Lenkiewicz had seen in the British Library. The trickster Kelley is similarly shown as an old man, his sparse locks brushed forward to cover his mutilated ears, holding an inscribed wax disc that formed part of one of the tables created by him; and Dee assists in their conversations with the angels. Once again, the point is driven home that despite all their claims to insight, nobility, and academic learning, the great majority of the alchemists depicted were no better – or worse – than Lenkiewicz's homeless friends and acquaintances who gave them their faces.

Indeed, the Elizabethan preoccupations with order, stability and hierarchy are all entirely absent from the completed mural. What mattered to the artist was the pulling back of the veil on the age where appearance mattered more than reality. In many respects, Lenkiewicz was light years ahead of mainstream academia in his recasting of the reign of Gloriana, jettisoning the comforting, politically conservative and nationalistic histories of writers such as A.L. Rowse – whose misogyny the artist would later mock in the 'Riddle Mural' that he painted for the Earl of St. Germans at Port Eliot – and advancing, in its place, a starkly different image of a ramshackle late Tudor state, hampered by the Queen's own marked indecision and riven by a succession of political crises. As Plymouth struggled to come to terms with its own imperial past in the wake of the Black Lives Matter Movement, in 2020, it was ironic that an acceptable, artistically satisfying, and intellectually astute vision of its past had been created by Robert Lenkiewicz almost half a century before, balancing the light with the shade, and emphasising that it is ideas that drive intellectual and social progress over and above personalities. The outcasts and the forgotten, including a young black Elizabethan, are recognised – and made recognisable – by the strokes of the artist's brush, and are lent the same dignity as the wealthy and the privileged. By the same token, the creative forces of the age and those who had risen by their own talents – Shakespeare, Jones, and Jonson, together with Drake – muscle out those courtiers, and even the Virgin Queen herself, whose claims to greatness stemmed only from the mere accident of birth. Once again, Lenkiewicz proved himself extraordinarily prescient and perceptive.
Within this context, let us look, for a moment, at his envisaging of Sir Francis Drake. Few figures have

suffered as much at the hands of historical revisionists, who have tended to promote a positive view of Imperial Spain – blindsiding its own role in the slave trade, the destruction of Native American civilisation, and the inquisitions launched against Jewish and Protestant 'heretics', together with those accused of witchcraft – in order to reduce the Devon seaman and circumnavigator of the globe to the status of no more than a particularly lucky and mendacious pirate. The Royal Navy's discomfort, in 2011, at the suggestion that his body – if recovered from the coast of Panama – should be accorded a state funeral provides a potent index of how far his reputation had fallen. Partly, this condescension stems from perceptions of social class within an extraordinarily privilege-ridden society. Drake's humble origins make him open to censure and question in a manner that courtiers like Walter Raleigh, the Earl of Leicester, and the Earl of Cumberland, simply are not. Yet, Lenkiewicz senses that and places Drake at the forefront of the crowd, resplendent in the gleaming armour that is not his own but is purloined from the back of a long-forgotten aristocrat. He is sharp and ruthlessness, with a gentility that runs only skin deep, but he is there on account of his own remarkable achievements and abilities, deserving of his fame but mindful – and standing as a reminder to us all – of its cost. If Elizabethan portrait painters had smoothed the rough edges from Drake's image, choosing to portray the West Country sailor as just another courtier and gentleman, then Lenkiewicz found in the physiognomy of his friend and sometime landlord, Terry Goldstone, the essentially wild and weather-beaten essence of the greatest navigator of the age.

Therefore, the tragedy is even more acute that – at the very point in our national consciousness, and searing re-evaluations of the collective past – when the Barbican Mural should have come into its own, as a powerful questioning of the uses of power and the importance of reason in human affairs, it has been lost to us and to the people of Plymouth. From the moment of its unveiling in the summer of 1972, it seemed to be particularly ill-starred. The love and the luck that had surrounded its creation seemed to all but evaporate. Some reactions were entirely predictable. The local council had not got quite what it had bargained for, while the Reverend of the nearby St. Jude's Church in Plymouth told the local press – in a spectacular misreading of the message underpinning the entire work – that: 'I was rather appalled when I saw it. It seems to be negative, macabre and horrific, not the sort of thing one really wants the public to feast its eyes on … There is nothing of heaven, light and purity. It is all destruction and hellish'.

More seriously, Lenkiewicz's future plans unexpectedly stalled. He had intended the Barbican Mural, together with the accompanying booklet that you now hold in your hands, to be the points of departure for a major new work on the occult and Kabbalistic philosophy, tentatively entitled 'Notes on the Elizabethan Esoteric Tradition', and had optimistically scheduled its publication for the end of 1973. The plan was to expand on the themes of witchcraft and alchemy, making use of his own rapidly expanding collection of occult books. Unfortunately, this project was eclipsed by the publication of Dame Frances Yates's seminal study of the thought of John Dee, Ramon Lull and Giordano Bruno, as Lenkiewicz detoured on an examination of Death and the Maiden, linking sex with death and the medieval *danse macabre*.

Above: The Barbican Mural and the painter's studio in 1973.

Right: As a practical joke, Lenkiewicz temporarily whitewashed his Barbican mural and replaced it with an illustration of three flying ducks, on April Fool's Day 1981.

The mural had established Lenkiewicz's fame, creating a new landmark in the city centre that was soon included in the guidebooks and photographed for sale as tourist postcards. It was claimed, at the time, that up to 15,000 visitors a week came to admire it and that, as a 'mecca for locals and tourists alike', it ranked 'among the West Country's top ten popular spots'. It resembled, in the words of his son, Reuben, 'his signature written on the landscape' and linked him, inextricably, with the people and the place. Curiously, however, for what was clearly a runaway success, the artist expressed somewhat ambivalent feelings about the Barbican Mural. He told Reuben that he had 'moved past it' and had himself photographed beneath it, sitting in a rubbish bin with his seventeenth-century-style, seven-league boots poking out. He barely alluded to the work when compiling later collections of catalogues and giving interviews, and sought to dismiss it as being 'fairly skilled but illustrational'. This sold both himself, and his art, short. As Reuben points out, this was more than a pity as 'it was so much a part of him, containing so many qualities that directly connected with so many different aspects of my Dad's life'.

This neglect was physical as well as emotional. On several occasions, the mural was vandalised, with the eyes of Lenkiewicz's self-portrait scratched out, possibly by a jealous rival, a jilted lover, or by an angered creditor. Robert attempted ad hoc, running repairs, patching and repainting whole sections on three different occasions. Unfortunately, major cracks began to appear across the surface of the wall and the paints, which seem – at best – to have been of variable quality and which began to fade and blanche, lending the mural a sense of fallen grandeur by the turn of the 1980s. However, these problems would have been far from insurmountable had it not been for Lenkiewicz's decision to launch a publicity stunt, in the form of an April Fool's joke, that arose out of one of his habitual disputes with the local council and which rebounded, badly, upon him. Several weeks after the city had destroyed another of his murals, depicting the Harlequinade, during the redevelopment of the Hoe Theatre, Lenkiewicz, stung by his inability to achieve critical acclaim and by the repeated accusation that his work was inherently kitsch, took matters into his own hands. He assembled a band of helpers and, in the space of one night (from 30 March to 1 April 1981) whitewashed over his Barbican Mural and replaced it with an expansive gleaming white surface, onto which were painted three large flying ducks. The Elizabethan heritage of the city was, thus, erased to make way for the most mindless expression of suburban kitsch and consumerism. It was an effective enough comment on the subordination of art to the marketplace and mediocrity, and one which if offered as performance art by a less talented but more media-friendly conceptual artist, would have won recognition and featured in all the Sunday supplements and university textbooks. However, Lenkiewicz's talent as a figurative painter and reputation as an eccentric practical joker, resulted in its impact being confined to a few raised eyebrows and wry smiles. Indeed, the artist was shocked and somewhat hurt by the discovery that many of the locals on the Barbican had not even registered the loss of his work. More importantly, he had badly miscalculated the amount of damage that the water-based whitewash would do to the images that now lay buried beneath. Thus, he had wrought destruction on the greatest of his public

works, with no gain save for a few more local headlines, that celebrated his lifestyle as opposed to his real talent.

A pattern of mistreatment was to characterise the mural's subsequent fate. By the winter of 1988, *Devon Life* magazine was noting that its paint 'was badly peeling' and that the artist was looking to replace it with a new work centring around The Seven Ages of Man and the Dance of Death. Lenkiewicz vowed that this would be 'better and more powerful' than the Elizabethan mural, building upon some of its themes and expressing similarly vaulting ambitions. Conceived as a study in reds and golds, it was to feature the portraits of some 300 individuals who had made a significant contribution to the cultural life of Plymouth. However, as his interviewer noted, Lenkiewicz was singularly 'unimpressed by the city council's suggestion that he should paint some 200 councillors and is looking for ideas from the general public as to who might be viable subjects'. He planned to preserve the faded grandeur of his Elizabethan epic underneath the new work, nailing wooden battens onto the side of the wall so that a screen of marine ply sheets faced with fibreglass would provide a fresh and level surface for him to start to paint. Although he claimed that the original mural would be hermetically sealed by the process, kept safe – if hidden away – for posterity, this seems doubtful. The damp inevitably trapped between the facade of the wall and the planking would, certainly, have hastened the destruction of the existing paintwork and, probably, have done serious harm to its replacement. It had all the hallmarks of a botched and ill-conceived job and the fastening of the battens – the only part of the project to be realised – gouged out more of the existing paint and transformed the gently decaying artwork into a pitiful relic, battle-scarred and unloved by its creator. The Seven Ages idea never took form, eclipsed by the artist's study of local education and educationalists and his new project The Painter with Women: Observations on the Theme of The Double.

Ironically, Lenkiewicz's energies – and the greater part of his fortune – was now devoted to acquiring original copies of the Early Modern esoteric and occult texts that had provided his initial inspiration for the Elizabethan mural. During his last years, he amassed an unrivalled private collection of rare books, manuscripts, and artefacts associated with demonology and witchcraft. In all probability, he owned some 3,000 volumes on the subject, including no less than ten different editions of the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* (the *Hammer of the Witches*), copies of practically all of Robert Fludd's extant writings, a host of grimoires, and two manuscripts possibly in the hand of Sir Edward Fairfax, and dated 1623, describing the demonic possession of his two daughters. It was a richly engaged, and engaging, collection that attested to the artist's ongoing and intensifying intellectual preoccupation with witchcraft. For from being set dressing, this was a working library that continued to inspire and inform the artist's work, as Lenkiewicz was still capable of producing great and innovative work based around this theme. His *St. Anthony Embracing a Demon*, an oil on canvas dating from 1993, ranks foremost among these and shows the old hermit, blanched and naked, embracing the darkness that lies within him, clutching a struggling, snarling, fiery eyed little demon in an act of self-love. Lenkiewicz saw the study in the following manner:

> 'The Temptation of St. Anthony, according to the Athanasius biography, is usually presented as an old man assailed by horrible demons from below over whom he eventually triumphs. I was much more interested in the idea of him trying to hold on to the demons; that is, the demons were trying to get away from him rather than vice versa. The popular view is that St. Anthony is hallucinating and the parallel view for me is that lovers, we in our relationships, are also hallucinating ... the other person in the relationship doesn't exist. I was ... interested in the fact that in many of the descriptions the demons are heard more than seen. I was interested in the mindless, meaningless chatter of the demons and of life itself and how it might relate to the way we communicate'.

The business of witchcraft had thus been re-orientated, for Lenkiewicz, from an external force which struck at thrones and whole peoples, to a purely internal manifestation of love, desire, fanaticism, and loss. As such, in a rapidly de-Christianising West, it was the psychological malaise that fascinated the artist, rather than the theological imperatives of the Early Modern witch-hunters to purge, purify or sublimate everything that sat outside the realm of religious orthodoxy and personal surety.

The tragedy was that in his obsessive drive to collect ever greater numbers of rare occult books, Lenkiewicz shredded both the finances of his estate and his own health, resulting in his premature death in August 2002 and the dispersal of his studio and library. As his canvases had never been acquired by public galleries, his work could be easily dismissed by critics, and he risked being entirely forgotten by the art world. Only his ruined mural remained on the Barbican, beside his shuttered and barred shop.

With the artist's estate still in administration, in the spring of 2006, Anna Navas, representing the Lenkiewicz Foundation (which had been created in order to preserve and enhance Robert's memory), told the present author that it was simply was not 'realistic to expect [the property developer who owned Lenkiewicz's former studio] to preserve the mural. In fact I think it would be impossible to do so'. Sadly, the intervening years have proved her to be absolutely right. Periodic attempts were made by local entrepreneurs to redevelop the Barbican site and various pitches were made in order to garner sufficient funds to restore or repaint the mural. In the main, these were characterised by an underestimation of the true costs, artistry, and technical skill required to see such a project through to a successful conclusion.

In 2015, the Lenkiewicz Foundation commissioned Richard Pelter, an expert on restoration, to report on the feasibility of restoring the mural. His view was that it might have been possible in the 1990s but that it was now too late, and that the painting was beyond saving. Although the mural retains a Grade II listed status, it has been threatened with destruction by successive landlords of the former McMullin's warehouse, with plans being submitted for the punching of windows through the warehouse wall in order to facilitate the development of luxury flats resulting in a stand-off over planning applications. It was a case of finance capital knowing the price of everything but the value of nothing, and only served to emphasise the harrowing decay of the images.

The face of Frances Howard – the witch on the Barbican – has become little more than a palimpsest, her face divided in two by a wooden slat: one eye remaining, now imploring our help rather than commanding our attention. She seems to know, as well as we do, that time is short before the summer sun blanches the last details from her courtly gown and the winter wind breaks off the remaining chips of paint that recall her expression, whipping them far out to sea and replacing her beauty with the brutal reality of jagged brick. In this manner, the aristocratic witch might be seen to have finally become one with the tens of thousands of her poor and anonymous sisters, hounded across Western Europe over the space of some 250 years, whose lives were fully submerged in the story of an imagined crime. It is a barely less savage indication of the blind workings of fate that Robert Lenkiewicz – portrait painter and unsurpassed modern muralist – devoted his latter years and the greater part of his fortune in collecting and preserving the relics of witches and witchcraft, only to have his books sold and his masterpiece consigned to oblivion. With hindsight, it is easy to see this prophesised in by the mural, itself; as the ill-shod feet of Simon Forman trample not only the metaphysical pamphlets of Agrippa, Fludd, and Dee into the gutter, but also the work of the artist, himself.

However, not all is lost. The prints and photographs made of the Barbican Mural, when still freshly illuminated, survive to record its glory, and are evidenced in the pages of this booklet, which has been commissioned by the Foundation in order to provide a lasting testimony to what once was. The preparatory sketches of Elizabethan sea dogs, acrobats, hobos, and knights are eagerly snapped-up by private collectors to be stored away and treasured. And, above all, the memories of a particular kind of magic and misrule still haunt the Barbican by night. It is a witchcraft rooted in optimism, in the belief in the creative power of the artist to change our material conditions for the better and to lift our collective consciousness far beyond the horizon of the warehouse wall. It evokes past endeavours – Drake's circumnavigation and the publication of the first Shakespeare folio – and conjures up the shades of another tumultuous cavalcade: not, this time, of a Queen and her nobles but that led by Robert, himself, with his train of companions, lovers, unfortunates, outcasts, draft-dodgers and hippy squatters seeking a better, and brighter, new world to call their own. In our uncertain present, it speaks for the freedom of the intellect to transcend the shackles of the gallows and take to the skies in the wake of the Rabbi's emancipatory call, like Spinoza – caught midpoint between dirt and the deity of reason – seeking out the stars.

Dr John Callow
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John Callow is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Suffolk, and has written widely on witchcraft, the arts, and the politics of popular culture. He is the author of *James II: King in Exile* (History Press, 2017); *Embracing the Darkness: A Cultural History of Witchcraft* (I.B. Tauris, 2018), which includes a study of Robert Lenkiewicz's occult art; and *The Last Witches of England* (2020).

Central span of the Barbican Mural in 2015. The porous wall surface, house paints with a limited lifespan, and the sea air have caused large areas of paint to flake and crumble or disappear entirely.

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Marking the 50th anniversary of the painting of the Barbican Mural by Plymouth artist Robert Lenkiewicz, this publication reproduces the original guide 'Notes on the Barbican Mural', first printed in 1972. In his own words, Lenkiewicz explains his 3,000-square-foot visual celebration of the symbolism, poetry, philosophy, alchemy, ceremonial magic, and the influence of Jewish thought on culture in the first Elizabethan Age between 1580 and 1620.

A new essay by cultural historian John Callow – 'The Witch on the Barbican' – explains the mural's origins in Plymouth's famous historical connection to the sailing of the *Mayflower* to the New World in 1620. He identifies the artist's friends and associates who modelled for the historical figures, and draws out the hidden meanings in the mural's complex symbolism.

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