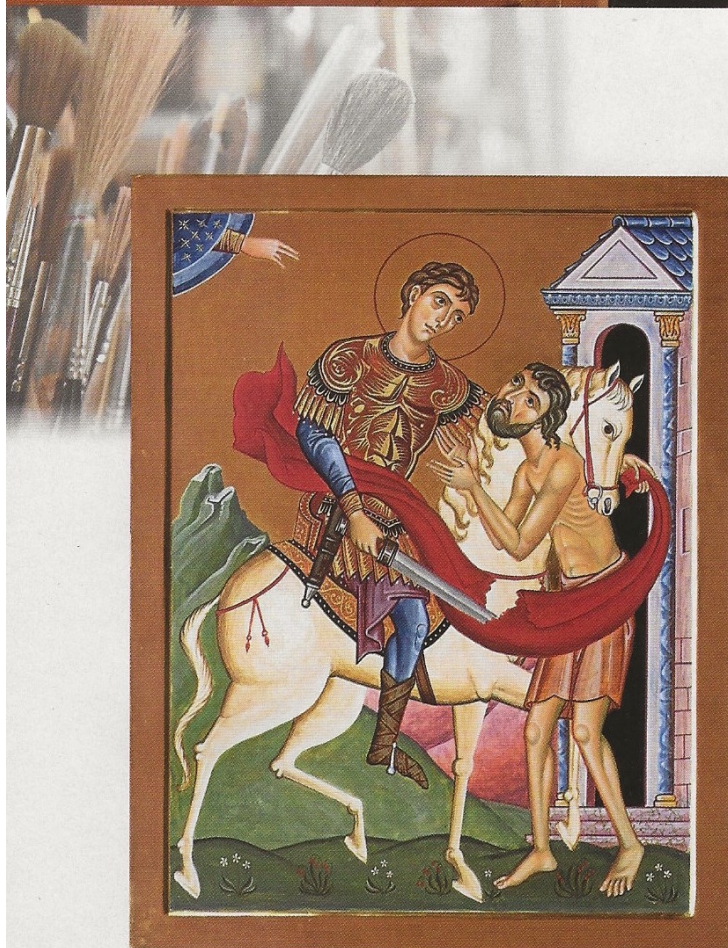


# TRULY ICONIC

SHIRLEY TART MEETS A  
SHROPSHIRE MAN WHO  
COMBINES FAITH AND  
ART ON A GLOBAL SCALE



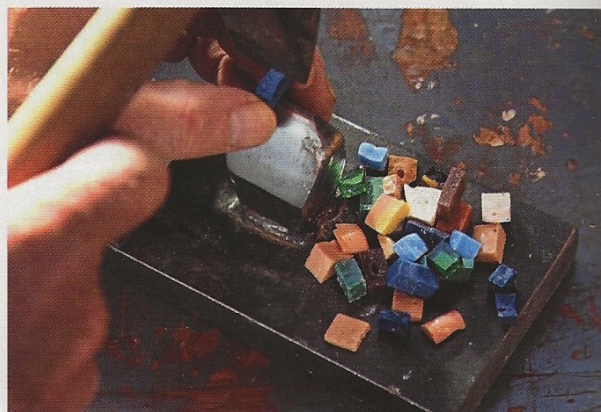




Ask Aidan Hart how he spends his time in his riverside workshop alongside Shrewsbury's English Bridge and he will tell you that he is an iconographer. Or, if you like, a painter and carver of sacred icons.

And maybe you will find that he has been a schoolteacher as well as a monk, spending two years on Mount Athos in Greece and six more as a hermit here in Shropshire.

There again, if it's just a friendly chat, Aidan might talk enthusiastically about the weekend football, how his son Alban and daughter Libby are both so keen on the game, playing as well as watching.







#### CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

Aidan Hart in his studio in Shrewsbury, hub of an international business; Aidan's triptych: *Jacob Wrestles with the Angel*, *The Transfiguration* and *Jacob's Dream of the Ladder*. It was commissioned for Shrewsbury School chapel in 2009; gifted artist Martin Earle who works with Aidan on major projects, painting a Crucifixion for a church in Bristol; smalti, hand-cut coloured glass for mosaics; *St Martin of Tours*, an icon in egg tempera which was a private commission in France last year.

#### PAGE 65:

Aidan's sculpture of the Virgin Mary and infant Jesus at Lincoln Cathedral. It's carved out of stone coloured with ground stone and earth pigments. All ancient and medieval sculpture was originally painted like this.

But proud dad Aidan chuckles: "Actually Libby would love to go into farming though. She loves the countryside and everything that goes with it."

He will also tell how he and wife Sarah plan their working weeks to protect family life and how he enjoys spending weekends at home with the family. All very nice and not unusual then. What most people will be used to.

But today, I want to work our way through an average day – if there is such a thing – in the life of Aidan Hart. And to do that, it's worth going back in time to when this charming, quietly spoken man was just a little lad.

Aidan tells me: "Although I was born in England, I grew up in New Zealand when the family moved there. I left school with a degree in English literature and a diploma in secondary education teaching which I did for a while."

We were enveloped in the workshop by the most amazing icons of many sizes, and what I'd call facial 'messages'. It was really an extraordinary experience.

Since Aidan's aim is to create edifices of the saints so that people can get nearer to Christ, it goes to show how very important and special being an iconographer is.

These icons really are so much more than just rather good paintings. They are heart and soul, disturbing and protecting, part of us, close to the saints.

It's possible to experience all of that just by standing and looking.

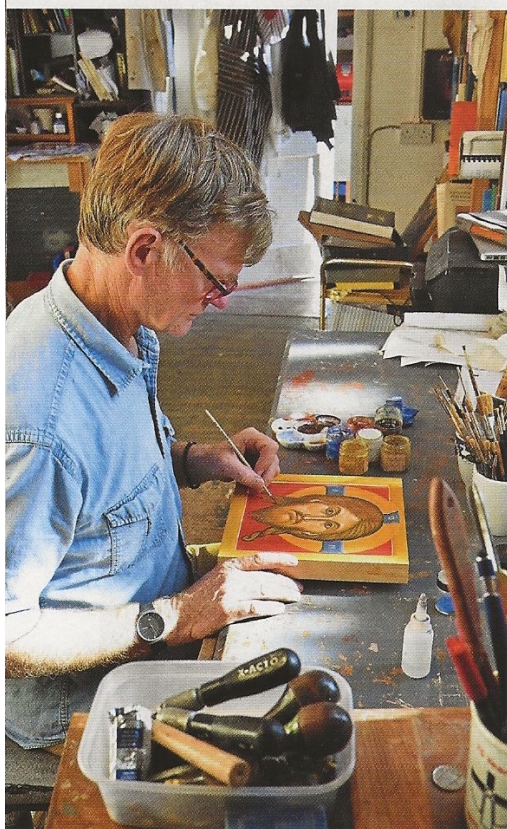
So where does it all come from? Aidan explains: "Well art had always been a big part of my family on both my father's and mother's side. And as well as that, now more than ever, we need







CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:  
Detail of a limestone carved icon screen at St Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church, Amsterdam, commissioned in 2011; *The Transfiguration*, Aidan's 10.5m by 4.8m fresco at Lancaster University, completed last year; one of the two specialist books that Aidan has written; *The Resurrection*, a mosaic at St George's Orthodox Church, Houston, Texas, commissioned last year; a bronze of Richard Chartres, Lord Bishop of London, commissioned by HRH The Prince of Wales in 2009; gold leaf for gilding; Aidan at work in his studio in Shrewsbury.



an emphasis on beauty, it's necessary for the health of the soul.

"But it is a sort of humble beauty rather than 'look at me.' And there is the architecture of it all as well, to make something that's dignified, if you like, and it's not just about cost."

Over the past 30 years, Aidan has created almost 1,000 icons to meet the liturgical hopes of icon painting in private and church collections across more than 25 countries throughout the world. His clients include royalty.

He works with a team of skilled craftspeople including cabinet maker Dylan Hartley and blacksmith Frazer Picot.

Not surprisingly, Aidan is also in great demand as a writer, lecturer and teacher – getting up at 5.30am to do the writing side of things is quite usual – and he has had many articles published on iconography, ecology and Orthodox spirituality.

In 2009 he founded the Certificate in Icon Painting, a three-year, part time programme and has published two specialist books – *Techniques of Icon* and

*Wall Painting and Beauty Spirits Matter*.

In recent years, Aidan has also been delighted to welcome gifted artist Martin Earle to work with him on major projects and on commissions of his own.

Indeed Martin has just completed a wonderful cross with the image which was commissioned for a Bristol church and will hang from the rafters. While Aidan's latest commission, *Our Lady of the Sign*, is also ready to go on the next part of its journey . . . to Cambridge.

Iconography is not the easiest thing to interpret. But a simple line from Aidan might be:

"Creating edifices of the saints so that people can get nearer to God."

He says: "Icons keep the faith in relationships with a

loving God. A moral code . . .

us, the icon, the person . . . it's a window leading us through. And you really do feel you are painting someone you have known for years."

He has a long-time deep faith, saying: "I've been a Christian since I was about 15 and first I was in the Baptist Church. Then my friend went to see two monks

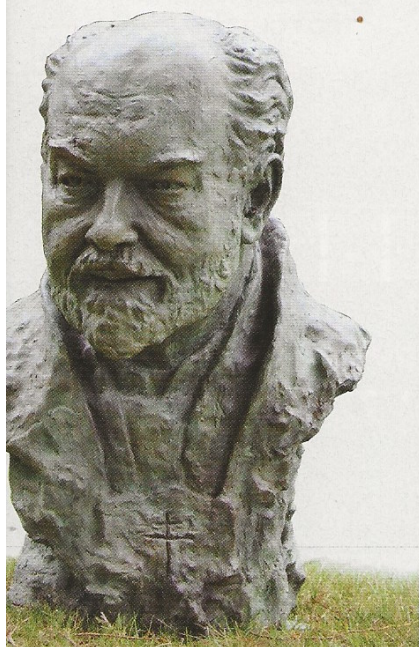






and came back very excited and said he thought Orthodoxy was for me."

And so it has been. In 1983, Aidan became a member of Shrewsbury's Greek Orthodox Church and he also explored the monastic life not just in Greece and UK but farther afield as well, including



America. And indeed that intense life of prayer has had a profound effect on his work.

And so, to meet the liturgical needs of the churches who commissioned him over the past 30 years, Aidan became an expert in a wide range of media – egg tempera panel painting, fresco, stone and wood carving, illuminated manuscript painting, church furniture design and most recently, mosaics.

Amongst so many more, Aidan has been commissioned for a Lancaster University wall painting of the Transfiguration, a Canterbury Cathedral icon, a silver Episcopal staff for His Holiness Kirill Patriarch of Russia as well as fresco chapel icons at Highbury for His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and many more wonderful examples of work from a master. What a pleasure and experience to meet him.

■ A series of five 15-minute programmes about Aidan painting an image of the Annunciation, is due to be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in the week before Christmas. The series, called Creation of an Icon, will be aired at 1.45pm each day from December 17 to 21 inclusive. Videos of the icon's progress will be available concurrently on iPlayer.

