

John and Peggy Booker moved with their children Christopher and Joey from Ilchester to set up Knighton House Preparatory School in 1950, and built a wonderful home for them and the girls of the school. It was based in the old farmhouse on the Portman estate near Blandford Forum in North Dorset, home too to Bryanston School. Their younger daughter Serena (pictured) was born there in 1954 in a violent thunderstorm and nicknamed 'Cly' by her family – short for 'Clytemnestra', the wife of Agamemnon, also born in a thunderstorm. Joey married and had three children, but suffered from acute depression and committed suicide in 1976.

Her parents retired to the Old Rectory in Shillingstone in 1980 and two years later further tragedy befell, when Cly was murdered when on holiday in Thailand – her guide was arrested and charged with her murder, but whilst on bail his body was found riddled with bullet wounds, so he never came to trial. Cly was cremated in a Buddhist ceremony in Thailand, where the British Vice-consul had placed a bunch of roses on her funeral pyre. Her ashes were brought back to England, where half were buried next to Joanna in the churchyard of St Nicolas' Church, Durweston, near the school. The remaining ashes were scattered on hillsides, some on the Dorset hills and some near Vienna where Cly had worked. Visiting the churchyard now, the girls' matching gravestones are complemented by the stone marking the burial place of their parents.



Before she went to Thailand, Cly had met Laurence Whistler. He had set out to be a poet and wrote a biography of Sir John Vanbrugh, but had abandoned this life and built up a career in glass engraving – Cly was a great admirer. After her memorial service in Durweston, Christopher approached Whistler to create a memorial window for the sisters – he had already been thinking of it. The glass panels, now displayed on the back of the organ in the North Quire aisle, are each dominated by a vision of a giant rose radiating light, with Dorset hill forts in the background. In the background of the left panel, shown here, is a view over Durweston village of Hod Hill, as seen from the school and in the right panel, a view of Hambleton Hill as seen from the Old Rectory in Shillingstone. By an extraordinary coincidence, Christopher had been reading T S Eliot's poem 'Little Gidding' from the Four Quartets, when he spoke to Whistler, who himself had already inscribed words of this poem on the glass. Please read the touching words on the glass and note that 'the moment of the rose and the moment of the yew tree are of equal duration' lie beneath the rose and the yew tree in the image.

Although originally intended for Durweston Church, the panels were installed in the Cathedral's north porch in 1985 before being moved to their current location in 1989.



Christopher Booker, one of the founders on Private Eye magazine, scriptwriter for 'That was the Week That was' and columnist for the Sunday Telegraph, died in 2019.

Laurence Whistler's other work in the Cathedral – the prism in the morning chapel – is of course a memorial to his brother, Rex, killed during the Normandy Landings in 1944. I wouldn't presume to write about Rex – the archive in the Salisbury Museum is comprehensive.

Ed: A great friend of ours was Laurence Whistler's secretary. Unfortunately, her life was also tragic as her only son died and she committed suicide.