

'GLASS PAINTING 1800-1900: AESTHETICS, HISTORY, CONSERVATION'

This 2-day international conference on the art, craft and preservation of 19th-century stained glass was held on 28 February to 1 March by the Society in association with the Worshipful Company of Glaziers at Glaziers' Hall, overlooking the River Thames by London Bridge.

DAY ONE: HISTORY AND IMAGERY

MORNING: Martin Harrison, the morning's chairman, set the scene with a thesis calling for a new framework for studying this period. He related changes in stained glass design directly both to sociocultural events and trends and to technological innovation. Important was the Great Exhibition of 1862, at which 25 firms displayed domestic and secular stained glass. Windows such as John Milner Allen's 'Lancelot and Elaine' in Northampton Town Hall, and later Pre-Raphaelite themes, were directly inspired by poema like Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King'. During this period the range of church iconography itself began to expand. Martin illustrated this by the example of 'The story of Ruth', a 1862 Heaton, Butler & Bayne window at Sculthorpe, Norfolk, a typical High Victorian overelaboration of the '15th-century style'. Ruth, the great-grandmother of David, may have been used to link the Old and New Testaments, but may also have been exemplifying the womanly virtues of loyalty, hard work, obedience, etc. in the period preceding women's suffrage, when using images of Mary could lead to accusations of mariolatry. As for the glass itself, the glaziers now had 140 colours to work with, and Martin suggested that developments in chromolithography may have prompted this desire to produce an ever greater range of tints in glass.

He then talked about the different 'schools' of glass painting. The first was the academic painterly 'Raphael-type' style as exemplified by George Hedgeland. In contrast was the 'Mosaicist' technique, as used by John Clayton. As resistance widened to the dictates of the Ecclesiological Society, whose Gothic tastes had hitherto dominated, glass painters looked elsewhere for inspiration: Bayne and William Burgess took ideas from sketchbooks recently published in France, and in London the art of Dante Gabriel Rossetti was a major influence. Two important themes reflected major preoccupations of Victorian industrial society: that of the countryside as a state of 'purity', versus the city as a place of moral turpitude, and that of the 'fallen woman'. These Martin tied in with the ideals of Christian socialism and Ruskin (several Pre-Raphaelites taught at an East End Working Men's College). He also described the rise of women Arts & Crafts glass painters and their problems in gaining acceptance.

Then Dr Elgin van Treesen-Vaassen gave a talk entitled 'Imported stained glass from Bavaria and the misunderstanding that was built up around it'. She said that what people generally think of as 'Bavarian' was actually that of a particular firm post 1880 in Munich: the Royal Bavarian Glass Painting Studio founded by King Ludwig I. This ruler, who was a follower of the 'Catholic Enlightenment', believed in educating the general public about the arts – buying art collections, building public museums and a library, and encouraging new churches to be built and neglected ones restored. He was heavily influenced by the art of the 'Nazarenes', who influenced the Pre-Raphaelites; they glorified the art of the Renaissance, especially Durer, and used bold outlines and flat colour. A Nazarene who had been asked to leave Rome arrived in Bavaria and established the glass workshop. He brought porcelain painters from Sevres; the painters were also given medieval glass to study, and designs by Durer. Enamels were developed modified from porcelain paints, and the entire reverse of the glass was often covered, except for the jewels, so that sunlight would not ruin the composition. Despite the fact that such treatments go back to the 15th century, these windows were later decried as a latter-day degeneration by the Ecclesiologists, who claimed that in a Review that a good window should be simple, admit light, and have its scenes marked out within mullions, to which one commentator replied that it was 'better to have art without transparency than transparency without art'.



John La Farge's Harvard window, Southwark Cathedral

The final talk of the morning was by Dr Sally Rush Bambrough, who discussed Edinburgh glass painters. She described the city during the 1830s–40s as a place of social mobility where those starting out in a trade could rise to become socially eminent. The partnership of Ballantine & Allan began in the old city, then in 1846 moved to new prestigious premises in George St in the new planned development that had been built around the medieval city. Another was Francis Oliphant, whose father Thomas had been a crown glass cutter; their firm absorbed that of William Cooper in the 1840s, moved to George St and built a three-storey workshop employing some 25 workers. What was keeping all these glass painters busy? Not the Presbyterian churches, whose interiors were very plain; rather it was the post-1745 secular boom in windows inspired by notions of a wild, romantic celtic past, conjured up by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, and depicted visually in the scenery of the Edinburgh Theatre Royal.

An important influence was the Government Trustees Academy, which took on promising apprentices. Frances Oliphant trained here with Sir William Allen, a renowned history and coat of arms painter, before being recruited to work for William Wailes, then for Hardman and for Pugin. It was Pugin who enticed Oliphant down to London and set him to cartooning the windows depicting kings and queens for the new House of Lords, which were subsequently executed by Ballantine & Allen.

AFTERNOON: Peter Cormack chaired the afternoon, and spoke about the eclectic range of art-historical and other 'source material' that had inspired post-1860 stained glass in Britain. He started with Henry Holiday and Sir Edward Burne-Jones, who had been concerned with monumental windows. A 1870 Holiday at St Mary's Paddington depicts the three Marys at Christ's tomb, and it reflected Italian 15th/16th-century Renaissance art rather than the earlier British glazing tradition. Similarly with the armoured figures of Burne-Jones, and this influence was also seen in Morris & Co. 1880s windows, and in Christopher Whall. Burne-Jones, in particular, emulated Botticelli, after he had seen one of the old master's paintings above a doorway in Italy. Following this other glass painters also took Botticelli as a source, including Christopher Whall (see his angel at Ashwell, Derbyshire) and Henry Payne. Burne-Jones himself also went on to develop an enthusiasm for Byzantine art, which can be seen in his use of strong mosaic-like effects and elongated figures (as in St Phillip's, Liverpool). Yet another influence on him and others such as Henry Payne was the pagan Hellenic tradition of Classicism, as exemplified by the latter's windows at Stokesey, Shropshire. Contemporary influences were also apparent: the intensely narrative work of Ford Maddox Brown was much copied, a Samuel Palmeresque style is evident too, and William Blake was a strong influence on many from the 1870s on, with figures in windows appearing within 'visionary bubbles', Blake-style angels, and use of streaky pinks and purples paralleling Blake's colours.

Following Peter, Dr Michael Kerney focused in on the development of commemorative stained glass. The idea of a window as a memorial had first been put forward by James

Martland in a pamphlet published by the Oxford Architectural Society, as an alternative to the increasing clutter caused by the overproliferation of sculptural memorials. On reading this, Rector John Menzies arranged for the first true memorial church window to be made by Thomas Willement in 1841. Shortly afterwards a memorial window was commissioned for Chichester Cathedral, commemorating the sister of the Dean (a friend of Martland's); as this was made by William Wailes, and was prominent window in a national building, it attracted much interest and was followed by another window at Fulham – the first in London. Soon the number of memorial windows mushroomed, and some church committees became concerned about the ever more diverse styles as well as questionable tastes of the windows appearing in their churches. Not wishing to discourage donated windows as such, they attempted to retain some control over their general style by imposing memorial 'programmes' in which series of windows were made first according to the church's tastes, with dates/donor's names left blank to be added afterwards. Another issue was subject matter: early windows commonly showed the resurrection of the person, but later on this was superseded by the depiction of national or local saints, or contemporary scenes. On occasion the question of taste has ended up in court: when the church at Nutfield in Surrey wished to replace a memorial window with a Morris design, the descendants of the original donor were so incensed that they fought the case all the way up to the Court of Arches.

EVENING LECTURE: The first day was rounded off by an evening lecture on the work of John La Farge given jointly by two leading authorities on this major figure in American stained glass. Dr Jim Yarnall spoke first, on 'John La Farge's iridescent universe'. He compared the styles of two La Farge windows from two periods: one from 1879, one of his first windows, the other a late window dated 1902. The first was made in an experimental, exploratory, sometimes chaotic style. La Farge had been fortunate enough to have made a fortune in real estate, after which he studied in France as a painter, his landscapes reflecting those of Courbet. He came to stained glass after a period with little training but some natural talent and a strong sense of colour. His first church commission was for some murals at New Trinity Church, Boston, executed in punchy colours. He sought to use variations in the glass rather than paint to depict shadow and highlights. His bold experimentation led to the invention of 'mosaic glass': layers of iridescent/opalescent glass held together by leading. The iridescent glass was compared to 'ancient decaying rock' and the Dome of the Rock chapel in Jerusalem.

The design of 1879 was his second – comprising paeonies on a blue border, with melted glass cabuchons and a frame in a 'celtic' floral style. This was bought by his patron Henry Gordon Marquand for his house Linden Gates (popularly known as 'Bric-a-brac Hall!'). After this, La Farge founded a workshop in New York, where he enjoyed the patronage of rich clients such as Cornelius Vanderbilt on 5th Avenue, for whom he made over 100 transomes, ceilings etc. – much of which was sadly lost as the mansion was razed in 1927 to make way for a skyscraper.

Opinion on the early windows was very varied, from Sir Lawrence Alma-Taderna's 'like a lot of beautifully coloured butterflies flying through the room' to Henry Holiday, who was quite dismissive: 'everything within the glass happens through the accidents of the glass ... we have substituted accident for design'. Evidently La Farge took note of the criticism, as later windows used single-layered opalescent glass and employed flat Japanese-type effects. An example of his late style is the 1902 commission for Spring and Autumn, two panels for William Collins Witney's Long Island house.

Julie Sloan then spoke on La Farge's materials and techniques. She said that his interest in glass was sparked off by a visit to England in 1873, where he saw windows by Burne-Jones, Morris and medieval glass. At the time stained glass was a young art in the US, and the glass was of poor quality. Subsequently, on his first commission for Harvard Memorial Hall, he had to convince

glassmakers to cast opalescent glass (previously used only in tableware) into flat sheets. These he plated to achieve the colour harmonics he was seeking, and also used confetti glass and amethysts in this commission.

Julie then described, with illustrations, other experimental techniques that La Farge had used. He painted with traditional oil paints as well as glass paint; he pierced the glass (probably by sandblasting) and inserted small pieces into it; he employed the bottoms of bottles cut into squares; his flowers were cast, up to an inch thick, in white opalescent glass and plated with pink. He also tried slumped glass, sliced alabaster, small pieces or jewels individually wrapped in wire or lead, broken jewels (e.g. in the 'Angel of Help'), and glueing pieces of coloured glass on to clear. Ground glass was sprinkled on between pieces of a lighter coloured glass to give shadows, then clear glass was plated on top. In 'The Old Philosopher' and other windows he experimented with fusing to join pieces of glass. However, nothing was known at the time about the different expansion coefficients of glass types and colours; in the 'Peacock' window the pieces failed to fuse in the firing, and so he abandoned this process and was forced to lead the design traditionally. By the 1880s, the colour range available commercially had improved, and so he was now able to achieve the desired effects by leading around individual pieces. A window might now contain over 8000 pieces! Finally, in late windows such as Spring and Autumn, he attempted to do without the division bars by supporting these panels between plate glass, but it proved a very expensive option.

The evening lecture was followed by the conference dinner.

DAY TWO: MATERIALS AND CONSERVATION

MORNING: The morning session, on materials, was chaired by Tony Benyon. Neil Moat began by asking 'What went ye out to see?' – a personal view of Victorian stained glass',



during which he made four main points. First, he pointed out that many windows of this era cannot be definitively ascribed. For example, in northern England there is a tendency to ascribe unsigned windows to William Wailes, but many of these could in fact be the work of John Gibson. The second point is that in order to have a real appreciation of these windows we need to go beyond mere connoisseurship of the iconography. Windows such as those of the Aesthete movement were clearly intended as works of art, not mere religious iconography. There is also a tendency to assume a seamless transition from the Gothic Revival to the Arts and Crafts – but windows such as those of Cook at Durham show that this is an oversimplification; here elements of the Gothic Revival appear together with a Japanese influence, Classicism, and unusual varieties of glass. Another example, the North transept window by T R Spence at Eccles, contains much Selby patented interleaved glass in a very white composition that is reminiscent of Whistler's 'White Girl'. This artist also solved the 'canopy problem' by use motifs such as chrysanthemums, again showing the influence of Japanese art at that time.

Moving on from this, Neil argued that we do not engage enough in an open critical discussion. For instance, Philip Bennison's window at Hartlepool (St Mary's, 1919) is seen as inaugurating the British Arts & Crafts school. However, there are problems with Bennison as an artist; for instance his WWI memorial windows can be of questionable sentiment – such as the window illustrated with Christ on the left and a 'tommy' soldier on the right. He added that he thought some of the best of early 20th-century work (e.g. by Frank Barber, who had trained at the RCA) represented a reaction against accepted 19th-century convention.

Finally, Neil left the audience to ponder the following question: 'Does the deeper appreciation of 19th-century stained glass remain the preserve of art historians and connoisseurs?'

Keith Hall followed with a detailed case study of a particular restoration project 'Rusthall 1855: a time capsule of Winston glass'. This church in Tunbridge Wells was one of the first to use Winston's new muff glass, and when Keith restored it 5 years ago he encountered severe bowing and cracking, storm glazing that had been installed with no ventilation provision, and use of hard Portland cement. The bowing was caused by a combination of inadequate support from too widely spaced saddle bars, on a design with large circular areas which the division leads followed, thermal expansion as the sun heated up the trapped air, too tight an installation and failure to use lime mortar, which would have allowed some expansion into the rebate.

Keith then discussed and showed slides of the glass and its problems. The cobalt blue was typical 'Winston blue', and some big pieces had stress cracks and surface deterioration; on the outside a sugar-like powder was forming and microscopic crazing could be seen on Mary's robe. There were also some lovely streakies in the border and the timbers of Noah's ark. However, the layers in the flashed ruby were starting to separate owing to layer incompatibility.

Keith also showed slides of a green glass deteriorating in another Rusthall window, in which the crazing extended through the surface and was prone to shatter, and 'fake streaky' effects in a Henry Hughes window there, produced by acid etching of flashed glass, as seen in another Hughes window at Gloucester Cathedral. Finally, he illustrated some examples of other unusual streakies of the period used by Hughes at Tenterden, Kent and by T R Spence at Aldershot.

Tony Benyon talked about the development of the different types of mouth-blown and cast glass that were available to stained glass makers throughout the 19th century. He began in 1800 with Kelp glass, continental sheet, flint and crown glass and then described how Antique glass changed and developed up to 1889 and the introduction of 'Priors Early English' slab glass.

He showed slides of various samples of glass rescued from the Fulham Glass House, which had been at the centre of the English Arts & Crafts stained glass movement, and compared the different types of slabs produced by the main suppliers including Chance antique sheets from the 1920s and pressed slabs from James Powell & sons.

Finally he talked about how important it was either to learn or to maintain a vocabulary of glass terms to identify the range of glass colours and different types of mouth-blown or cast glass encountered during the restoration of 19th-century windows.

AFTERNOON: Steve Clare, the afternoon's chairman, began by discussing problems resulting from differences in philosophy. He called for a 'creative dialogue' between individuals skilled in history, art and technical aspects and a willingness to experiment to find the best approach to each conservation project, rather than what he called 'the dead hand of an inappropriate orthodoxy' and a blanket 'minimal intervention' approach as

dictated by historical experts. He gave the example of a Flemish roundel restored with abrasive compounds at Wells, following a discussion on the use of pumice in India. He added that the Wells team also used edge bonding on 19th-century glass where it would work, or conversely would replace a piece that was missing or beyond repair. He questioned whether, for example, a face where the painting is almost entirely missing should be simply left as it was, and said that the issue was not merely technical, but human. Much 19th-century glass was in churches not museums, where the people might care very much whether their Christ had a face, but could find themselves in adversarial situations, and the CCC needed to be much more proactive about getting a balanced discussion at an early stage. Where paint loss was heavy, he suggested considering Keith Barley's technique of cold painting, to avoid the risks of refiring old glass. Finally, Steve underlined the need to extend knowledge of techniques used by 19th-century painters to prevent these being lost, and suggested that those versed in such techniques be encouraged to pass them on through 'master classes'.

Mark Bambrough then gave an account of his ongoing research in aesthetic protective glazing. His aim was to develop a system that did not detract from the architecture. He said he had been experimenting with a French (Debitus) method to produce glass that was transparent on transmission (i.e. seen from the inside) but opaque on reflection (seen from the outside) – approximating the visual effect of the stained glass itself. The process involved photographing the window exterior digitally, digitizing this image into printers' (CMYK) colours to obtain colour separation, blowing these up to full size and then screen printing the image on to decal sheets. These sheets were then placed on a plain glass sheet, which was slumped into a mould made from a cast of the original panel. On firing, the colour image migrated into the surface of the glass and burnt out somewhat, and the result was used as a backing layer to the original panel.

Finally, Julie Sloan returned to discuss conservation issues particular to American opalescent windows. She said that because these windows were often plated – up to 8 layers thick, with unsupported plates hanging in space – the technical problems were often magnified. There might be bowing in several planes, or one layer that supported 4–5 others with only very narrow leads would typically give out. The lead used was also much softer and weaker than used in the UK. These windows were now needed re-leading with restoration-grade lead. When taken apart, each layer was given a separate rubbing and was kept in its own tray.

She also described how an earlier repairer on a Boston window with jewelled areas had removed the pieces of green glass between the blue, completely changing the colour balance of that section! She generally left jewelled sections as the solder used binds the jewels together. However, those windows using copper foil often had inadequate support: La Farge used tiny flat bars, and some were supported only by plate glass in a frame where the weight of glass was pushing the frame apart. She also described myriad other problems: dirt or crizzling within internal plated areas hard to reach, paint loss from low-fired or cold-painted areas, as well as

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ANNOUNCEMENT: Sir John Soane's Museum is planning an open-house event later this year for BSMGP members who would like to see the stained glass. Watch this space!

