

2008 AUTUMN CONFERENCE: BRISTOL 28-31 AUGUST



This year's BSMGP conference was at Bristol and Wells, an area with a wealth of late medieval, High Victorian and modern stained glass. On **DAY 1**, proceedings kicked off after supper with introductions by the conference guides: first Geoffrey Robinson FMGP, who gave us a history of his career in glass and that of his father Arnold Robinson (AWR), who had worked for Christopher Whall before going to the Bristol firm of Joseph Bell & Sons. David O'Connor followed, briefly summarizing medieval glass to be found around Bristol and Wells – much of it imported. Stephen Clare then offered delegates the opportunity to 'drop in' at his workshop and view ongoing projects. Geoffrey Lane, the Hon. Librarian, concluded with a lecture on three important glazing schemes begun within a decade, two on our itinerary: Dean Henry Glemham's north aisle windows on the Life of Christ in Bristol Cathedral (c.1667?) and Bishop Robert Creighton's great west window at Wells (1670–2).

DAY 2 was devoted to Bristol – the first stop *Parkway Methodist Church*, with a 1971 three-light east window in dalles de verre by Geoffrey Robinson depicting Sun and planets mirroring God and His angels. Geoffrey detailed its manufacture, which necessitated building plasticine 'dams' to contain the flow of resin. We carried on to *St Mary Redcliffe*, which has over 30 windows High Victorian dating from 1854, mostly by Clayton & Bell, and five 1960s windows in the Lady Chapel by Harry Stammers. Many of the windows were memorials, including Carl Almquist's 'Wayfarer's window', depicting Ss George, Michael and Alban, commemorating a Boer War officer.

At *Bristol Cathedral*, which had suffered extensive WWII damage, the medieval glass in the Lady Chapel and the great east window (a 14th-century Tree of Jesse) had been much restored and repaired by Joseph Bell and AWR. In the latter piece, the lower part is considerably altered from the original: the central figure of Jesse is entirely by AWR, replacing an unidentifiable standing prophet that had been inserted in an earlier 'restoration' 130 years before. He had also inserted the present Christ on the Cross in place of a smaller Christ in Judgement. Also by AWR in the north aisle are four 'Civil Defence' WWII commemorative windows (1949–51), with police and firemen, nurses, wardens etc. providing a history lesson to visiting schoolchildren. The fine west rose is by Hardmans (1877).



Bristol Cathedral has at present only one window in an entirely modern, abstract idiom: the south choir aisle east window designed in 1965 by Keith New, a decade after his windows for Coventry Cathedral (photo left). Its theme was Genesis 1 'the spirit of God moving on the face of the waters', its central brilliant red image depicting the energy of the Holy Spirit and the Pentecost fire, and in the tracery the gifts of the Holy Spirit represented by seven lamps.

After lunch we were treated to a dazzling whistlestop tour of the extremes of old and new, thankfully whisked between hilltop venues by coach, thus conserving our energies for the abundant treasures within each. Gathering at the *Lord Mayor's Chapel*, David O'Connor introduced its collection of late medieval glass as well as a late-18th-century portrait of Thomas Beckett executed in enamels by James Pearson at the peak of his career. We were then bussed up to the heights, to *St Michaels on the Mount Without*, for a look at more AWR windows from the 1950s – with St Michael and dragon in streaky red–yellow flames and seagreen–brown scales. Here also can be found a late 1960s east window by Harry Stammers, also some memorial windows to the Gloucestershire regiment who worshipped at the church, one depicting David and Jonathan, with lionskin cloak complete with claws.

At the next two stops, the *Old Baptist College* and *Tyndale Baptist Church*, two windows in very different styles informed us of the fate of William Tyndale, a Baptist founding figure whose books were burnt and who was imprisoned and then burned at the stake for his radical ideas. The first is an early window (1916) by AWR, 3 years after he left Whall's studio and very much in that tradition, with prison scenes depicted in deep inky blues and the burning fires in startling gold-pink Norman slab (photo below). At the latter also is a John Bunyan memorial window with scenes from the Pilgrim's Progress, amongst more works by AWR, some cut by Geoffrey as an apprentice, and two windows designed by him (1960 and 1971).



Moving westwards to Clifton, we dropped in awhile at *All Saints, Pembroke Road*, a Victorian (1860s) building largely rebuilt in the 1960s after WWII incendiary bombing. Behind the Baptistery font, its smouldering intense colour dominating the space, is a two-light 1967 semiabstract window by John Piper, the left light in fiery orange-yellows on a deep-blue ground depicting the River of Life and the right a stylized Tree of Life, menorah-like (from Revelation xxii) in blue-greens with marigold-orange 'flowers', executed in fibreglass. There are also three small windows in the western wall of the Atrium containing glass preserved from the old church, and the last window completed by Christopher Webb before his death in 1967. Further along the road, the modern (1970–3) *Clifton RC cathedral* houses two dalles de verre gems by Henry Haig: the right-hand window 'Pentecost' in fiery tones and leaping lines an expression of the joy and gifts of the Spirit, on the left 'Jubilation' depicting 'the sense of happiness or freedom that may be experienced on an open beach where earth, sky, and sea meet', with broad horizontal planes and summer tones (photo above left).

Back on board for a last call before supper and yet another treat at *St Alban's, Westbury Park*: a church entirely designed in the Arts & Crafts idiom, with exquisitely crafted woodcarving in the choir stalls and the organ casement, Margaret Chilton windows high in the south transept depicting the building of the church in the early 1900s, and in the Baptistery showing cherubs with instruments of the Passion. Six windows by AWR in the north and south aisles, and the east and west windows dating between 1920 and 1925, reveal his stylistic evolution away from early designs strongly mirroring the Whall tradition. In the east window on the theme of heavenly figures confronting evil, he has depicted his own friends who had died in the war as nurses, soldiers, sailors and airmen.



DAY 3 saw the conference decamp southwards by coach towards the tiny cathedral city of Wells. A detour en route (with a wrong turn or two!) took us to the church of *St Peter with Paul, Kilmersdon*, with memorial windows by James Powell & Sons (1870–1914): several reused designs by Henry Holliday (Faith, Hope and Charity, 1880; Christ blessing Children, 1886; Baptism, 1889) and the last (1914) design depicting angels holding arms by Louis Davis.

Arriving in Wells, our first destination was *Wells Cathedral*, where at the west front we were introduced to the history of and political motives behind the building, and the hierarchical structure of the figures on the frontage, then divided into two groups to visit the east end and west end windows in turn, guided variously by Tim Ayers and David O'Connor. First, though, to the chapter house (photo above left), where the windows of the steps contain the oldest surviving glass (about 1285), comprising patterns in ruby, green, blue and white glass with grisaille. Further up the steps on the east side is a charming little silver-stained 15th-century *St Mary Magdalene* with her casket. The main windows of the chapter house have lost most of their original glass, but a few Resurrection scenes remain in the high tracery lights (dated 1318 onwards), with the dead rising from their coffins, also some heraldic designs. Around the walls are the seats for the chapter members, where they remembered benefactors on a daily basis, the latter competing to be 'up there' in the glass.

The main building was extended eastwards in the early 14th century to accommodate a retroquire intended to hold the remains of Bishop William of March, popularly regarded as a saint, which the clergy had hoped to have verified by Rome so elevating the status of the Wells church (but which never happened). The colour here was used to dramatic effect: the paler blander tones along the aisle windows gradually increasing in intensity as one moved east to end in a blaze of colour at the eastern end in the *Lady Chapel* with its five enormous windows depicting the Virgin as the 'Star of the Sea'. Here the upper parts and the tracery windows contain the original glass (c. 1320–6), whereas the lower lights are mostly 'mosaics' – comprising fragments salvaged from windows vandalized in the Civil War and Monmouth's 1685 Rebellion and 'restored' by Thomas Willement in 1843. Within the broken jumble one can make out several intact figures, including an angel with a trumpet, Eve with serpent, and *St Mark's* lion (photo above centre).

Moving west into the quire, high up is the unique 'Golden window', a singular Tree of Jesse full of golden-yellow and green glass installed about 1340, and unusually including a Crucifixion as well as the Virgin and Child, the usual climax, and putting each figure beneath a canopy. At the far western end is the great west window – Robert Creighton's glazing scheme (earlier described by Geoffrey Lane) inserted when he was Dean (1660–70). Much repaired, as it is subject to the full force of westerly gales (one in 1703–4 killing Bishop Kidder and his wife in the Palace), before its 'restoration' in 1813 the central light contained Creighton vested as a bishop. At that date ancient glass purchased from Rouen (some depicting the Beheading of John the Baptist, possibly by the Netherlandish painter Arnold of Nijmegen from 1502–12) was inserted by William Eginton, who also himself designed the figures of *Ss Andrew, Paul and Bartholomew* to complete the theme. In 1926–31, being in a dangerous condition, these in turn were removed to other parts of the building, and replaced by a new central light by A. K. Nicholson depicting the Transfiguration – the original theme according to current evidence.

In the nave, transepts and western quire no early-13th-century glass survived the early-15th-century insertion of 'Perpendicular' mullions and tracery, necessitating new glass. A little of the latter glass, executed in silver-stain, does remain though – particularly in the traceries: in the quire aisles, a small window high up on the south side shows Christ crucified on a green cross – the tree of life – and in *St Katharine's Chapel* is a collection of fantastic bird and plant quarries. Coming forward in time, J. Powell & Sons supplied 18 windows between 1888 and 1905, including several designs by their studio head Hardgrave. Halfway up the south aisle are four two-light windows by C. E. Kempe, dating to 1905–6.

After so much study, a leisurely stroll around Wells back streets was called for, and a reviving mug of tea at Steve Clare's conservation workshop nearby, where we could examine in close-up on the workbench some Christopher Whall glass from Holy Trinity in Sloane Square, and the same Francis Eginton window from Shrewsbury some delegates had seen *in situ* at a previous conference.

DAY 4 After a very merry time at the conference dinner into the early hours, the next morning saw many of us again in need of tea, this time most welcomingly provided along with bagels at Ros Grimshaw's studio. Here we spent some time leisurely perusing works old and new in her studio and the garden – with views along the Avon gorge towards Brunel's iron bridge dramatically spanning it at a dizzying height – and discovering several charming pieces by Ros hidden in the outbuildings. Much fortified, we headed further out of the city, where a fitting finale awaited in the form of a visit to *Tyntesfield House at Wraxall* – a National Trust property that had featured in the 'Restoration' TV series. The afternoon was spent meandering through extensive landscaped grounds, at the far end of which stood the main house and chapel. The house was extended in the 1860s for owner William Gibbs, who as a High Churchman felt a Prayer Room within the house was inadequate. The decorative glass in the house and the windows in the chapel were provided by James Powell & Sons, for a total of about £2400 including carriage and fixing costs. Powell entrusted the work to Harry Ellis Wooldridge (1845–1917), who had earlier assisted Henry Holiday after working for Edward Burne Jones, and who was now designing in neo-Grecian Classical style as can be seen in the chapel nave at Tyntesfield. Thanks to the preservation of the firm's order books and window cash books (at the London Archive of Art & Design) the programme of glazing at Tyntesfield can be followed in detail. Of most interest were the chapel windows dating from 1874, mostly by Wooldridge (single Biblical figures with foliage depicting plants of the Holy Land), and with a western rose window by JC Powell. The nave figures have no obvious order, although the Virgin and *St Peter*, two of those closest to Christ, appear nearest to the Apse (where His life, death and resurrection are depicted) while *Abraham* and *Elijah* from the Old Testament are westernmost. Five two-light windows were later ordered for the apse, being installed in March 1875 after Mr Gibbs' death. However, these were not to his widow's liking, particularly the Resurrection window, hence the background decoration was changed and the centre lights replaced. The unwanted panels were returned to Powell's workshop, and later installed in Holy Trinity church, near Fleet Street. Although the replacement windows show some loss of pigment, their general condition is still much superior to many Powell windows of that period (e.g. *Latimer* in Bucks), in which most of the pigment has vanished as a result of using an 'improved flux to permit firing at a lower temperature' (!!!).
Chris Wyard