

2009 ANNUAL CONFERENCE: DUNDEE & FIFE



Our conference started with a 'good dinner' followed by Mr Peter Cormack speaking, by way of introduction, on the career of Louis Davis from school photographs and working through to the 50s. Though not Scottish, his best works are at Dunblane and in many other Scottish churches, with his followers using glass, colour, paint and texturing.

FRIDAY Our first full day started wet, a prompting chairman requesting us to be early for the bus – of course we all were early and the bus was late! – to St Andrews and luckily dry.

St Leonards Church 1903 was designed by Peter McGregor Chalmers at a cost of £5189. A warm welcome was given by the Minister and a talk by Peter in the dark Romanesque interior. Their centenary guidebook listed all the glass with designers' names and dates, and, giving biographical details; a collection of small windows with glass by Holiday, Margaret Chilton (photo above) and Alec Walker of the Stephen Adam Studios. The north windows were encumbered by the adjacent hall and poorly backlit. Throughout our visits we saw many examples of 'external plating' without ventilation – severe buckling resulting here in one by Walker to the south.

Next, we moved to Holy Trinity, the principal town kirk, a huge building filled with 20th-century glass of the highest quality. Again, after a warm welcome by the Church Officer and the Minister, Peter and, following the dedicated guide stained glass book (did you buy a copy?) we toured the windows. Among the treasures was a window by Reginald Hallward of 1912, depicting the Resurrection and Ascension (photo below). The church officer then showed us the collection of silver and historical artefacts and demonstrated the scold's bridal on Ashley Pengelly.



The afternoon started at St Salvator's University Chapel, a grand 15th-century building restored in the late 19th century including work by Chalmers – the reredos and altar incorporating mosaics by Strachan. Here was glass by Ballantine, and by Hardman's of the 1880s. A previous scheme by Hardman in the apse had been replaced in the 1950s during stonework restoration with windows by Gordon Webster and William Wilson, the designs of these owing much to Strachan and Hendry – a window of his is just visible in the west gallery. Next, the small but exquisite Episcopal Church of the Holy Trinity, its chancel of 1906 designed by Chester architect John Douglas, the nave by Paul Waterhouse, 1920, contrasting Arts & Crafts gothic with Italianate. Among the finer was an east window by Louis Davies, one to the north by Carl Parsons from 1923/4 (below), Strachan in the baptistry and Hendry in the south aisle.

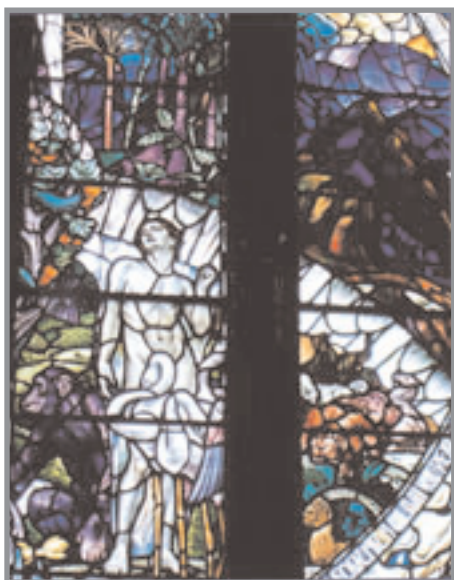


We stopped briefly to view the famous Norman chancel of Leuchars church on the way home before supper and a lecture by Peter on Christopher Whall, his life and works, beginning appropriately in the 'Heavenly City' at Burford. English artists had long been interested in Scottish themes from the 1890s onwards. Peter detailed his early windows, his beginning as a newspaper cartoonist, his use of intense colour, slab glass and high-quality figure painting, and later his stylized figures and simplification. Douglas Strachan had commented that as there was no medieval glass surviving in Scotland to give precedence this enabled a free style to develop. Following World War 1, profound emotions led to a number of memorial windows.

SATURDAY Day two saw sunshine in a cloudless sky – at least to start with – and we began with 13th-century Brechin cathedral, restored by John Honeyman with John Keppie in 1900–2 followed by Peter McGregor-Chalmers, who introduced Henry Holiday. Peter Cormack described the major scheme of glazing to the chancel by Holiday – his most extensive surviving, emphasizing the fine line drawing, classical art influences and use of glass made in his own studio – and the 'textile designs', also his own. The tour followed later windows by W. Wilson and Webster – work of the 1950s and 60s – and was rounded off by an enjoyable lunch at the cathedral hall provided by the parish.



A brief visit followed to see the Pictish stones at Aberlemne and the spectacular views. On to Forfar, to the Lowson Memorial Church, where we were welcomed by the Minister, tea and cake, built in 1914 and designed by Alexander Marshall MacKenzie of Aberdeen – the product of piety and a jute fortune. The spectacular windows by Douglas Strachan from 1916 onwards were described by Peter, as well as illustrations of Strachan’s authenticity of expression – owing much to Blake and unhindered by historical precedent when interpreting Biblical scenes, and the subjects – history to the west, Creation to the north (detail below), the Apocalypse to the south, the life of Christ and the Tedeum in the east window.



Our last visit of the day was to Longforgan, a more typical Scottish kirk, to see a recent Nativity – 2002 – by Emma Butler-Cole. In contrast to the previous windows it was of bold colour and a huge sweeping figure. Other work included an excellent window by Stephen Adams Studios, and glass by Clayton & Bell. Here Peter explained the differences between the ‘east’ and the ‘west’ schools and further emphasized the forceful dynamic of the Scottish tradition.

Then followed the conference dinner – and reception – we were really well fed and watered at West Park – thanks are due!

SUNDAY In the morning were members’ presentations:

Hilary Davies: showed a number of small enamelled panels – one based on 11th-century Roman examples, in stain and scratching out, and a particularly moving panel of Our Lady of Walsingham with vinyets of the suffering in the recent war in Gaza.

Helen Robinson: showed a number of door panels – mostly with an Arts & Crafts theme including inspiration from Baillie Scott, followed by a re-showing of the ‘cross window’ made from London Church incorporating tiles – to give a visual effect externally as well as silhouette inside.

Christine Bryce: had not done much this year so reviewed her work from the previous including designs for Branspeth, and an excellent guidebook prepared with the local Tourist Board on the windows of Millam.

Jane Bayliss: showed us the new window at Ballater – made up from designs by a local artist, and a private commission at the Bridge of Alan – interpreting the landscape.

Caroline & Tony Benyon: Tony presented their recent joint works at Rochester and St Alban’s Cathedrals, and the Temple Church in London.

For the afternoon, we went back across Fife and through St Andrews where Peter hinted that we could revisit to recap if anyone had forgotten. First stop via narrow lanes was Kellie Castle (photo top right) to pay deference to Sir Robert Lorimer, architect friend of Whall & Strachan. Then on to Pittenweem and an agile bus driver negotiated the narrow streets of the town and harbour to find us St John’s Episcopal Church; works by Ballantine from the 1870s into the 20th century showing a



‘progression’ of their work. The earlier windows were in traditional Gothic Revival style, whereas the latest, of 1914, used idioms drawn from Louis Davis and Strachan – streaky glass diamond quarries with nodes of colour at came intersections – a hybrid window in that the figure drawing remains traditional and similar to earlier work (detail below). Two small lancets by Hendry were to the west and a new window from 2005 in the porch was by a local artist. In the chancel was good woodwork to Lorimer’s design carried out by the Clowe Bros.



Next, we visited the immediately adjacent town kirk where were found a whole series of windows by William Wilson and his pupils dating from the 1950s, the latest of 1974 by Blyth & Blair under Wilson’s direction – he was by this time blind (detail below). Peter reminded us that Wilson trained at Ballantine’s and had been their principal designer.



It was an immensely enjoyable conference packed with goodies and warm welcomes wherever we went.

Thanks to the organization, especially Peter Cormack, and congratulations to the whips – we were always on time!

Graham Holland