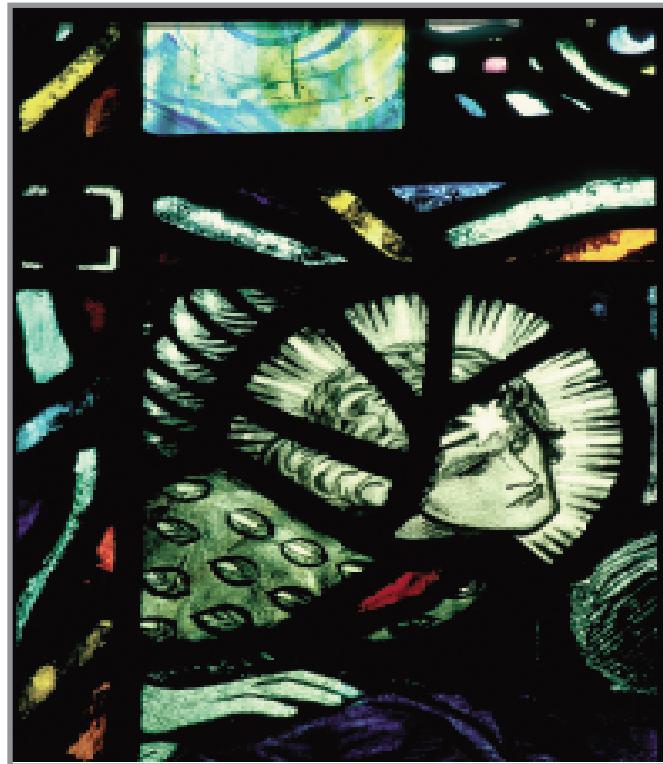

Event Review: Summer lecture Friday 19 June: 'Exploring Arts & Crafts Stained Glass: a 40-year adventure in light and colour – an illustrated lecture' by Peter Cormack

The lecture was an introduction to some of the main themes of the speaker's newly-published book, *Arts & Crafts Stained Glass* (Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art). He began by saying that his discovery of this rich field of research had begun when he was a student at Cambridge in the 1970s, and had developed particularly during his thirty years working as a curator at the William Morris Gallery in London. He paid tribute to the work of other scholars in the field, especially Martin Harrison's *Victorian Stained Glass*, Birkin Haward's two books on 19th-century glass in Norfolk and Suffolk and Nicola Gordon Bowe's studies of Irish stained glass. He also emphasized the critical importance of 'field-work' – actually going to the places where windows are located to see them in their architectural context. He felt that the internet, with its wealth of images, could sometimes deter people from studying stained glass properly. This was why the BSMGP's conferences, with their focussed study-visits to churches and other sites, were such a valuable exercise.

He then took us through the main narrative of his book, beginning with the pioneers who, from the late 1870s onwards, had championed stained glass as a modern and expressive art form, instead of the formulaic and imitative productions of firms like C. E. Kempe. Henry Holiday was one of the most effective campaigners against commercialism and historicism: his windows



Richard J. Stubington: detail of window at Lapworth church, Warwickshire, 1923



Christopher Whall: detail of window in Gloucester Cathedral Lady Chapel, 1901

feature superb figure-drawing combined with a real knowledge of his craft. He even made his own 'Double-H slab' glass. Other artists who took up stained glass in the early days of the Arts & Crafts revival were Walter Crane, William Blake Richmond (whose spectacular windows for St Paul's Cathedral were tragically all lost in the Blitz) and Heywood Sumner. They were all inspired by the new types of glass being manufactured at the time, notably 'slab glass' (first made by Britten & Gilson of Southwark).

The first artist to use this new material was Christopher Whall, who was described by the speaker as the central 'hero' of his book. He summarised Whall's career: his early unsatisfactory experience of designing for commercial firms; his decision to learn the techniques of his craft so that he could both design and make his windows; and his rapid rise as one of the 'stars' of the Arts & Crafts Movement in the 1890s.

Whall's greatest opportunity – although also his biggest challenge – came in 1898, when he was asked to make new windows for the Lady Chapel at Gloucester Cathedral (photo above). We were told how Whall was able to undertake the commission because he had a workforce of young assistants who had all been his students at the Central School of Arts & Crafts and the Royal College of Art. Whall encouraged them to contribute some of their own ideas to his Gloucester windows, so that the commission was very much a collaborative effort.

The role of women was particularly stressed, both as artists and, in the case of Mary Lowndes, for her enterprise in establishing the partnership of Lowndes & Drury, in whose studio-workshop premises many of Whall's male and female students were able to operate as independent designer-makers. Work by Margaret Chilton, Theodora Salusbury and Mabel Esplin (who made windows for the new Anglican cathedral at Khartoum) showed the diverse talents of these women.

Christopher Whall's influence as an inspirational teacher was disseminated through his classic 1905 book *Stained Glass Work*, and by those of his pupils and co-workers who worked in Birmingham, Dublin, Scotland and elsewhere. Henry Payne set up a stained glass course at Birmingham in 1901 after receiving instruction from Whall; his many talented students included Florence Camm, Margaret Rope (photo below) and Richard Stubington (photo bottom left). In Dublin, Whall's pupil Alfred Child taught at the city's art college and helped run the Tower of Glass ('An Túr Gloine') studio with Sarah Purser, where one of the outstanding young artists was Wilhelmina Geddes, who later worked in London at Lowndes & Drury's Glass House.



Margaret Rope: St Winifred window at Newport RC church, Shropshire, 1916

Douglas and Alexander Strachan: detail of east window, Westruther Parish Kirk, Borders, c.1902



In Scotland, Whall's influence can be seen most strikingly in the work of the brothers Douglas and Alexander Strachan (photo above). The speaker said that he was particularly gratified to have solved the longstanding enigma of how the Strachans had managed to absorb so fully the Whall idiom: as explained in his book, the 'missing link' proved to be Alex Strachan's time working as one of Whall's assistants in 1900. Photographs of several windows by Douglas Strachan – another of the book's principal figures – demonstrated the developments in his vigorous and always beautifully crafted style.

One chapter of the book is devoted to a subject that has been relatively little known until recently, the strong Transatlantic connection between British and American stained glass in the early twentieth century. We were told how Charles Connick first discovered Whall's work when he saw windows at the Advent Church in Boston, leading to the two artists meeting in London in 1910. This led to Connick inaugurating his own studio in Boston, which became the stimulus for a complete regeneration of American stained glass, hitherto dominated by what the speaker called 'the milky nacreous hues' of Tiffany's opalescent work. Some of Connick's monumental commissions, such as the windows of Heinz Memorial Chapel in Pittsburgh, showed his formidable skills as designer and craftsman, as did the much smaller 'Sandwich Medallions', made of recycled glass excavated from the rubbish tips of nineteenth-century glass manufacturers.

The lecture ended with a short tribute to one of Christopher Whall's pupils, Hugh Arnold, who had a distinguished career as both an artist-craftsman and a historian of stained glass before the Great War. This was tragically cut short when Arnold volunteered for military service in 1914. He was killed exactly one hundred years ago, at Gallipoli in August 1915. The audience's attention was drawn to the little memorial plaque to Arnold, on the wall of the art Workers Guild lecture hall.