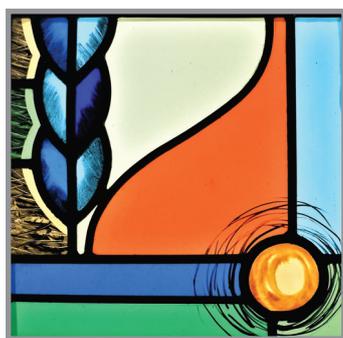


Review: Discussion Day at Glaziers' Hall

About 50 people came to the BSMGP Discussion Day on Friday May 25th to learn from four practising artists who are members of the Society and see some of the prize-winning entries in this year's Stephen's Competition. The Glaziers' Company had generously donated the use of their Library Hall for our members' use while four artist/craftsmen (Zoe Angle, Andrew Taylor, Peter Berry and Sophie Lister Hussain) had kindly agreed to speak on the challenges and joys of running their own studio. Caroline Swash was responsible for the proceedings, introducing the session with her memories of growing up in a household where her father spent his entire working life building windows in a studio attached to the house. Having visited Jane Gray at her studio and house in Shrawardine and obtained Jane's well-illustrated biographical book 'Playing with Rainbows', Caroline endeavoured to outline the creative trajectory of Jane's life in glass. This included Jane's formative years at the Royal College helping to build the Coventry Cathedral windows, her time spent working as assistant to Lawrence Lee and the many commissions carried out from her own small studio in Uxbridge. At 87 years of age, Jane continues to create new glasswork – an example to everyone present!



Zoe Angle, now running her own studio in Acton, described her journey from a fine art course at Sheffield to a 'work placement' at Goddard and Gibbs Studio where she developed and refined her technical skills in glass painting under the aegis of Norman Atwood, Simon Ratcliffe and Philip Broome. Following the birth of her son and the closure of the firm, she joined a shared studio and gradually learnt the most effective ways of earning a living. She gave very good advice to us all based on her own experiences. We learnt of the importance of a good support



system and the need to network and advertise. She described the effectiveness of contacts with house agents, architects and especially 'design and build companies'. She showed us some fascinating examples of her work including a window based on an Alfred Waterhouse design. Zoe advised us to 'invest in professionals' and get

business and advertising advice. She also suggested that we 'realize our specialisms', which in her case were glass-painting skills of a very high standard acquired during her time at G & G. She ended by inviting us all to the 'West London Art Factory' to see her work and enjoy one of the many 'Open and Event Days' held throughout the year.

Andrew Taylor followed with a wonderfully discursive description of his journey from a deeply impressionable childhood in South Africa to art school in Wales where the space and colour of the Brecon Beacons reminded him of home and where he acquired his first job as a scene painter for the Welsh Opera Company. The scale of this work was most impressive and hinted at his later relaxed attitude to large-scale commissions during his career as a stained glass artist. In terms of artistic influence, Andrew mentioned art books in Cardiff Library and works from Renaissance painters to Oscar Kokoschka, Paul Klee, painters of the Blaauw Reiter as well as his enthusiasm for Gabriel Loire's 'Prisoners of Conscience' window in Salisbury Cathedral

with its powerful reds and blues. Most of his stained glass studio experience had been gained with Alf Fisher at Chapel Studios following a short course taken with Amal Ghosh at City Lit. He described his time with Fisher as 'my apprenticeship' and told the audience of the encouragement he received from Alf, with whom he learnt how to deal with architects and vicars, researching historical background, getting into the 'story' of the window and learning about heraldry – 'I was really untutored in my thinking until then'. Andrew showed several windows created at that time. These included a 'Seed and the Sower' subject for the Tropnell Chapel at Great Chalfield and the 'William Herschel' (Astronomy) window for St Laurence Church, Slough. Andrew said that he admired the inventiveness of John Hayward's windows and the interpretation of Chagall's painterly designs into glass by Charles Marq. He then described his other pursuits (landscape painting, working in other media and choral singing) as being fundamental to the creativity he required for working in glass.

During the discussion period that followed, Andrew talked about his different ways of 'painting' on glass, his fascination with Chinese calligraphy, its power and spontaneity, and revealed that he valued these qualities in his own work – adding a final reminder to us all that 'Design is but a third of the way!' Lunch followed, mostly taken outdoors at Southwark Cathedral's own eatery, almost opposite Glaziers Hall.

Peter Berry was one of the few Associate Members who responded to the call for speakers a year ago when the programme was at the planning stage. He gave a really informative talk on the subject of running a country studio workshop. But, before moving on to his current work, he described his journey in glass from his time as a trainee sales rep at a commercial studio in Exeter to his important formative years at Swansea College of Art when Tim Lewis, Glenys Cour and John Edwards were teaching there. He showed us his winning design for the Stephens Competition, 'Christ in the Inner City' for Chichester Cathedral, sadly 'Not made'. On moving to the town of Calne in Wiltshire, he rented his current studio 'The Old Dairy' from where he can see sheep and red kites through his north-facing window. He also mentioned the importance of Patrick Reyntiens' book 'Technique in Stained Glass' when setting up a new studio.

He described his commissions with respect and humour. Most were for homes in the locality, a mix of old and new. Many were front door or landing windows in which he tried to combine sensitivity to the building with the donors' taste. Peter also spoke of his enjoyment in

making exhibition pieces, having shown his work in the '40cm Squared' BSMGP show at the Cochrane Gallery in London. Especially impressive were his design and completed window for the memorial to 'other ranks' near to the old RAF Wartime base at Hullavington. This recent project required sheets of delicately coloured glass, which could still be bought direct from the craftsmen at 'English Antique Glass' near Birmingham. Peter concluded his talk with the wise observation that a regular income was essential, revealing that he had a 'driving job' to pay the bills, which enabled him to start work in his studio at 9.00 am every day.



Peter Berry's 'WAAF window' at St Giles, Stanton St Quintin, Wilts

Sophie Lister Hussein was the final speaker that afternoon, with a fascinating talk about her life in art and glass – growing up in Anglesey – finding delight in all the colours and textures of that beautiful wild Island. She had studied fashion and then glass at Wrexham College of Art in North Wales, enjoying the colours and textures of yarns and later the colours and textures of glass. She had won first prize in the Stevens Competition in 1991 with a powerful representation of the life of Lawrence Olivier and was immediately offered a place at Goddard and Gibbs Studios by its Managing Director, Neil Maurer. Here she had to work accurately and fast in the fabrication of new windows of every sort, shape and kind, an experience that supported the creation of all her later work. She also learnt how to use the newly available bonding materials vital in the creation of large-scale contemporary architectural work, which she has since used with such skill on becoming a ‘freelance’ artist craftsman in 2001.

She showed us some of her enchanting sculptural glass pieces – mostly for schools – and described in detail the hazards and joys

of being independent. She now works from Thames Side Studios where she makes and teaches glass. She also passed on useful contact details for those interested, including screen-printing, sandblasting, acid etching and other techniques in the creation of their own work, and she shared her experiences as an entrepreneur, reminding the audience of the importance of good business practice and suggesting one-third of the cost of the project to be paid immediately, as well as a written agreement to be drawn up.

A general discussion session followed, with all four speakers answering questions. These ranged from recommendations of sources of information (Artists’ Newsletter) to suggestions for visits by the BSMGP to Oundle School Chapel, Chichester, Reading, Tudely and Peshurst ... indeed, enthusiasm for actually ‘seeing’ stained glass appeared to be high on everyone’s list. Other suggestions included ‘Health and safety’ on the one hand and ‘Latest techniques in architectural glass’ on the other – a wide choice indeed for next year.

Caroline Swash