

BSMGP CONFERENCE 4th –6th September 1998 NINETEENTH CENTURY STAINED GLASS IN GLASGOW

In the 19th century Glasgow became the second city of the British Empire. It invented itself. Architecture and the applied arts played an important part both in the city's search for a modern international identity and the self-expression of its newly rich inhabitants. Industrial decline has meant that the offices and houses of Glasgow's businessmen remain intact, if sadly neglected. Although a large number of city's extravagant churches are lost or closed, many are still in use.

The Disruption of the Established Church of Scotland in 1843 led to what has been called "the ambition of architecture" among the three rival Presbyterian factions in the attempt to lure affluent citizens through their respective doors. Traditional religious imagery and symbolism had no place in Presbyterian worship and stained glass was introduced for theatrical effect rather than as a reference to the Medieval past. Glasgow stained glass artists experimented freely with subject matter, style and technique, blurring distinctions between the religious and the secular so that designs could be reused in domestic settings.

Glasgow's pioneering interior decorator and stained glass artist Daniel Cottier (1838-91) was an ambassador of the Aesthetic movement – the reaction against the ugliness of High Victorian design – in Britain, America and Australia. After Cottier moved to London in 1869, his successor, Stephen Adam (1848 – 1910) continued to urge Glasgow's affluent middle classes that art was the antidote to industry. Stained glass was essential to the modern "Home Beautiful" in that it shut out the reality of city life. Adam's Greek goddesses still watch dreamily over interiors in the West End of Glasgow once filled with other such icons of beauty as blue and white Chinese vases and Japanese screens.

Working in a northern industrial

city perhaps explains the Glasgow artists' love of rich colour. In 1883 Ford Madox Brown commented that Cottier "...as a colourist has a range of performance beyond that of any other modern artist". Adam shared Cottier's ability. The painters collectively known as 'The Glasgow Boys' active in the 1880's and 90's were celebrated for their almost decorative use of flat tertiary colour and outline drawing inspired by Japanese prints. The freelance stained glass designer on the periphery of this group, David Gauld (1867-1936) considered that, "A panel of stained glass ...is primarily an exercise in colour, and secondarily a piece of design, a matter of balance and contours, while subject ...counts for nothing..." Gauld initiated a tendency towards semi-abstract in Glasgow glass which fully explored the innate translucent and two-dimensional qualities of the medium. Towards the end of the century, in response to the ever-increasing range of coloured glasses, modelling in glass paint was hardly ever used at all. Where the generous budget of a church commission allowed, design became a bravura exercise in pure colour. Artists designing for Oscar Paterson (1863-1934) and William Meikle & Sons experimented with plating and cameo techniques introduced by La Farge and Tiffany in America to create windows with powerful depth and tonality. In his recently published *Scotland's Stained Glass: Making the Colours Sing* (Stationery Office 1997), Michael Donnelly explores the importance of shipbuilding as a stimulus to the applied arts in Glasgow. Interestingly, he suggests that the corrosive effects of salt water were a further pragmatic reason for avoiding the use of glass paint. From 1893 the applied arts, included stained glass, were taught at the Glasgow School of Art. Classes were attended by the apprentice architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh (1868-1928) and the new building he designed four years later is a

fluid synthesis of architecture, stained glass, metalwork, ceramics and wood carving. This parallel teaching of architecture and the applied arts played an important part in the evolution of Glasgow's idiosyncratic style of Art Nouveau, closer to the work of the Viennese architects Joseph Hoffmann and

Joseph Maria Olbrich than contemporary English architecture and design. Although the names of the partner architects James Salmon (1873 – 1924) and John Gaff Gillespie (1870-1926) are now forgotten outside Glasgow, the London arts magazine *The Studio* once featured their richly crafted interiors, in which stained glass was prominent, as model examples of modern domestic living.

Mackintosh approached stained glass design as an architect. His panels animated his interiors but did not darken or disturb them. He preferred their use in internal doors, screens and cupboards rather than windows, drawing flowing abstract designs in black lead across white glass. Carefully placed touches of strong colour flashed signals across space as the light changed and doors opened and closed. His sensitive and innovative synthesis of stained glass and interior design was taken up all over Glasgow. What has become known as 'Glasgow Style' stained glass was remarkable for the sophistication of its Art Nouveau lead line drawing, particularly windows and panels by George Walton and Company and Stephen Adam Junior (1873 – 1960), and for its constant reinvention of a single symbolic idea, the 'Tree of Life'

♦ Sally Rush



William Meikle & Sons - details of window
c1905 now in St. Mungo's Museum

The Conference at Strathclyde University will emphasize 19c West of Scotland glass and some more recent work. It will illustrate the work of, among others, Cottier, Adam, Paterson, Meikle, Wilson, Mackintosh and Walton through lectures and visits, including Glasgow Cathedral, St Mungo's Museum, Burrell Collection stores and Paisley Abbey. Optional visits to Glasgow School of Art's Mackintosh Building or the Burrell Collection will be arranged if there is sufficient demand. A session for presenting members' work will be included.

The full cost for members is £135 (residential) or £95 (non-residential). Non-members should add £25 to the appropriate fee.

Travel to Glasgow need not be expensive. Advance booking can reduce the return fare to £30 by rail from London and £69 by air from Bournemouth, Gatwick, Luton, Stansted and other regional airports.

The conference will include a photographic exhibition of recent work by stained glass artists working in Scotland and entries are invited. For details contact Eilidh Keith on 0141 339 5952 ♦ Stephen Richard
For a conference application form, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Stephen Richard, 4 Clarence Drive, Glasgow G12 9QJ
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