

## AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2005: EDINBURGH



On the first day of September this year, BSMGP members gathered for 4 days of talking, walking, looking and the occasional frolic. These accounts of the events by two participants were held over from the last Newsletter in order to be able to print them in full. (Photos of glass courtesy Iain Galbraith.)

### FROM IAIN GALBRAITH:

For once the Scottish weather showed a friendly face and smiled benevolently throughout this conference – gentle early autumn weather with splendid ambient temperatures. Accommodation was based at Heriot-Watt University's Riccarton Campus in the Lothian countryside – comfortable, functional and rather impersonal and with catering reminiscent of school meals!

The contents of this Conference divided into clear categories – the Edinburgh studio of James Ballantine; Arts & Crafts windows in Scotland; Glasgow Glass of Alfred Webster & Stephen Adam, and a concluding comprehensive tour of Edinburgh Glass. A series of experts addressed these issues with clarity and erudition – Sally Rush Bambrough, Peter Cormack, Douglas Hogg, Paul Lucky, and Elizabeth Cumming.

After dinner on Thursday (and dinner was a marvellous example of Scottish thrift – extras (even one orange!) charged for at the cash desk of the self-service canteen – ouch! Scotland! Edinburgh!). Sally Rush Bambrough set the scene expertly with an overview of James Ballantine's stained glass, excellently illustrated. Ballantine belongs to the long coda of the Scottish Enlightenment and in his studio many aspiring young artists received their training from this Scottish man of letters.

Friday was based entirely in Edinburgh and there was indeed much to view of the Capital's stained glass. We began by visiting the National Shrine at Edinburgh Castle. The Shrine is the work of one of Scotland's premier architects, Robert Lorimer, and the complete glass schema was by Scotland's premier stained glass artist (or one of them, depending upon individual opinion), Douglas Strachan. An introductory talk was given by a Colonel of Infantry – brisk, articulate, structured (and with orders I think, to shoot any



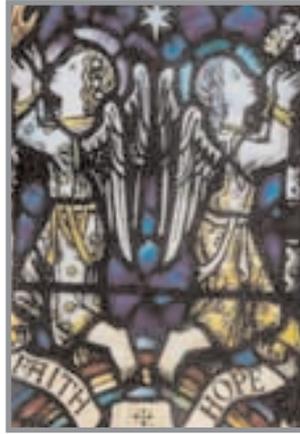
(left) Edinburgh Castle, St Margaret's Chapel, Douglas Strachan; (above) St Giles Cathedral, James Ballantine; (below left) Dunblane Cathedral, Louis Davis detail

recalcitrant BSMGP members/stragglers!) – and then Peter Cormack gave one of his lucid and penetrating commentaries on the allegorical language and significance of Strachan's glass. As usual with Peter, this was erudite and accessible and communicated clearly. The Shrine is guarded by constantly prowling custodians and photography is forbidden. But what a wealth of meaning and what depth of human emotion contained in this glass – the roundels with their cameos of war are worth special attention, believe me. (A coffee in the prestigious Queen Anne Coffee House, near the Shrine was most welcome, and the accompanying banana cake had all the lightness and elegance of a small brick – Edinburgh, you can surely do better than this.)

The company scattered for lunch and gathered again in St Giles Cathedral where three experts dealt with different topics: Sally Rush Bambrough, in the nave of the cathedral, placing Ballantine's schema of windows in context; Peter Cormack in the magnificent Thistle Chapel explaining about Louis Davis and the armorial glass and Lorimer's wonderful work; Paul Lucky at the Crossing talking about restoration and conservation of windows, his expertise making this complex process seem much less complicated than it obviously is. How fortunate we were to have such a professional trio, each contributing a different specialism. We then moved to Edinburgh's famous Greyfriars Kirk (Greyfriars Bobby – the wonderful, faithful terrier who slept for years on the grave of Auld Jock, his dead master) with its scheme of geometric and medallion glass, again by Ballantine, and Ballantine's fine memorial windows to George Buchanan, tutor to the young James VI (and to those south of the Border!) and one of the great European scholars of his day. (Sadly, at this point my camera suffered a severe heart attack (or overkill) and I had to leave the company to purchase another camera – not quite perfect timing – so I missed out on Heriot's Hospital visit.)

Friday evening was devoted to an illuminating lecture by Peter Cormack on three artists whose windows are of major importance in Scotland's churches – Louis Davis, Herbert Hendrie and Douglas Strachan. This lecture not only emphasized what we had already seen of Strachan's glass in the Castle's Shrine and in St Margaret's Chapel, but splendidly set the scene for Saturday's visits to glass by Hendrie and Davis (and Peter, it's time you started publishing those valuable scripts).

Saturday morning saw an early drive through the flat Lothian countryside to Falkirk Old Parish Church and two fine windows by Christopher Whall, thence to Lecropt Kirk high on its eminence overlooking the flat carse lands of Stirlingshire. This handsome gothic revival kirk of 1826 contains windows from the final phase of the illustrious Stephen Adam's career – glowing, lustrous windows with strange and sinister cherubim faces – and a large chancel window by Adam's younger colleague and successor, Alfred Webster. Webster was tragically killed in Flanders Fields in 1915, but his surviving corpus of work speaks of a blossoming virtuoso – a Mozart of stained glass – in his windows of high technical skill,



FROM SARAH EVANS:

**THURSDAY** As I stepped off the plane full of anticipation at what we were going to see over the next few days, I was greeted by blue skies and sunshine, a warm welcome indeed. Members continued to arrive throughout the afternoon from far afield. We found our rooms, all following Sue's instructions to look out for those boulders. Once we had settled in (thin the walls and lumpy the mattresses recalling student days) we all had our first experience of presenting our cards in the canteen, lest anyone dare take that extra piece of fruit!

After dinner we had an opportunity to look at a display of some very exciting pieces of contemporary Scottish stained glass before going into our first lecture by Dr Sally Rush Bamrough. Douglas Hogg's introduction, a warm welcome to north of the border to all of us from down south and beyond, described some of the history surrounding Edinburgh, a city full of civic pride: the Athens of the North. Sally Rush's talk and slides introduced us to the work of James Ballantine and the development of his studio in the 19th century and put much of what we were to see the next day into historical context. After collecting our bus money for the next day it was off to bed.

**FRIDAY** A fine day dawned and following breakfast we all caught the bus. Edinburgh Castle stood proudly waiting for us high up upon its volcanic plug. Our first visit was to the Scottish National War Memorial, a remarkable and poignant exposition of national art and craftsmanship. It revealed to us how Douglas Strachan adapted the arts and craft movement to make something truly Scottish. The windows depicting the various aspects and awfulness of war were most moving. With their rather muted colouring and tones, beautiful detail and variety of glass they show the human story. The wonderful windows in the shrine, stronger though in colouring, contain a forcefulness and great power, with great stylization of the figures and graphic bold leading. There was so much to take in and, as I began contemplating my sketch book, we unfortunately had to move on. From the large scale of the memorial we moved to St Margaret's Chapel, taking in the wonderful views of the City laid out beneath us basking in the late summer sunshine. The windows, again by Strachan, cast a wonderful light and shed colour throughout this intimate chapel. If only I had been alone, no offence to anyone, but I could imagine this being the most magical of places if only empty and silent. Then it was time to find some lunch.

The afternoon began in St Giles. It was a shame that several windows were hidden under scaffolding and I peered longingly to see the glowing colours of Strachan's window in the North Transept. However, there were delights waiting for us in the richly decorative but intimate space of the Thistle Chapel. A very welcome cup of tea then awaited us at Greyfriars' Church, the windows here showing just how James Ballantine developed an appropriately inoffensive design formula to secure the Presbyterian market. But I think we all wanted to hear Rona's story about the Greyfriars' Bobby. The abruptness at which her story was curtailed left us all wondering ... Then it was on to George Heriot's Hospital, which we were to discover had been Douglas' school. I'm sure those walls could have told us many a story. The chapel there contained the first pieces of stained glass in a Presbyterian place of worship in Edinburgh. We finally wended our way back to Heriot-Watt in time for dinner. That evening, Peter Cormack's lecture, together with his wonderful slides, gave us an excellent overview and taste of what the next day held in store.

**SATURDAY** It was up with the lark, again a beautiful day greeted us and after an early breakfast it was on to the coach. Douglas regaled us with a CD by the contemporary Scottish band, the Peat Bog Fairies, their music so evocative of the beautiful Scottish countryside around Edinburgh that we were passing through. Our first visit was to Dalmeny House, home of the Earls of Rosebery since 1662. I felt as if I was stepping back into history as I entered the house, full of history but still a home very much alive today, as Lady Rosebery described the house full this summer of her five children and their children. Here we saw some early 16th Century glass which Douglas had restored. We were also privileged to see the marvellous collection of furniture and paintings together with (top left) Lecropt Kirk, Alfred Webster detail; (top right) Kippen Kirk, Herbert Hendrie detail; (left) Kathy Shaw and Frank and Sue Ashworth take the plunge!

marvellous invention and a superb colour range. The climax of Webster's work is the great South Transept window in Glasgow's Lansdown Church, where Webster's control of subtle allegory is worth viewing (Christ, mounted upon a donkey, does not ride into Jerusalem but into Glasgow to be greeted by a crowd of citizens, whose faces tell their own tales). This virtuosic element can easily be seen in Lecropt's Te Deum window of 1911, and this was elucidated by Peter Cormack.

Thereafter a short journey to the compact cathedral town of Dunblane and the magnum opus of Louis Davis in his six great choir windows of the cathedral, the four windows called, Allegory, Chaos, Earth and Humanity being flanked by the four archangels Michael, Gabriel, Uriel, Raphael. These glorious, swirling windows are packed with symbolism, explained in a scarce commentary by RED Sketchley. These windows are based upon the Benedicite, the song of the Three Holy Children, Ananias, Azarias and Misael and according to Sketchley this song, 'utters the longing of the whole Creation for union with God ... blessed in one music of adoration'. These windows were made between 1913 and 1915 at the behest of Sir Robert Gounger, in memory of his mother, and no expense was spared. These are among the truly great windows in Scottish churches.

A late afternoon visit to Kippen Kirk, across the carse from Lecropt, brought an astonishing array of art treasures – stained glass by Hendrie; paintings by D Y Cameron and Thomas Monnington; bronzes by Alfred Gilbert; sculpture by Hew Lorimer – a veritable cornucopia assembled by the Scottish artist D Y Cameron whose home was in Kippen and who loved this Church – a church that is worth seeking out personally, for it certainly is sui generis in Scotland.

From Kippen I returned home because of Sunday duties in my own church in Glasgow, and thus missed both John Hume's keynote address at dinner (and John has accomplished so much for the Arts in Scotland), and what, I'm sure, would be Douglas Hogg's memorable tour of other Edinburgh stained glass (Douglas was formerly Head of the Stained Glass Department at Edinburgh College of Art). But someone else will report on these. For myself this was a great Conference, in fine company, with speakers of real quality, and all with weather to match. James Aitchison's poem about Edinburgh's Princes Street Gardens could well apply to BSMGP's Edinburgh Conference and its stained glass windows.

*Year after year these images recur  
in this amphitheatre of still air,  
your eyes grow charitable, the place persuades.  
Haste ye back.*





*Kippen Kirk, Herbert Hendrie detail*

many documents of historical interest. Our next stop was Old and St Moldan's parish church in Falkirk where there was very welcome refreshment waiting for us. Here we looked at two windows by Christopher Whall, triumphs of his early career. With nature the primary inspiration, the windows contain great strength of colour, blending rich deep colour with neutrals. Then it was on to Lecropt Church at the Bridge of Allan, nestling in beautiful countryside. Here again, we saw how the Arts and Crafts movement was interpreted by a Scottish artist, this time Alf Webster, who produced a very expressive and powerful form early in the 20th century. The window contained wonderfully delicate detail and colour, beautiful acid etching and fine glass.

Our next visit was to Dunblane Cathedral and a very warm welcome awaited us with a wonderful lunch organized by the ladies of the Cathedral. For me Dunblane Cathedral was one of the great highlights of the conference. I felt like a child in a sweet shop as I came upon the choir windows by Louis Davis, my eyes not quite knowing where to rest as they darted from one window of glorious colour to another, not wanting to miss a thing. They were poetic and glowing. There was so much more to see: a pair of windows by Davis in the south wall containing a wistfulness and great beauty, Gordon Webster's window in the north east corner, the very striking windows by Strachan and Webster in the Chapter house, and, hearing again about the architect Robert Lorimer (I thought back to the Scottish National War Memorial), I marvelled at the many and beautiful carvings that he designed for the choir together with the magnificent reredos screen. There was so much to take in, but for all these I kept coming back to the windows in the choir. I wish we could have stayed longer. They have certainly left a lasting and very graphic imprint on my memory. I just hope that I will have an opportunity before too long to spend more time taking in the glories that are Dunblane Cathedral. So it was with reluctance that I had to leave and make my way back to the coach. I felt our next port of call, Kippen Kirk, had a hard act to follow. However, the church contained a great richness of Arts and Craft work with glass by Herbert Hendrie. Here we saw wonderful modulations of colour, pale tints alongside rich colours, graphic figure drawing in a very linear style, draftmanship ideally translated to the medium of glass and beautiful small landscape details. Several of us got quite excited at the thought of a relaxing hour in a nearby pub, after all it had been a busy and tiring day (was it really Peter caught on camera dozing on the coach?). However this was not to be and it was back to Heriot-Watt. Then it was a quick wash and brush up for the conference dinner where it was interesting to hear Prof. John Hume speak about commissioning in Scottish churches. Douglas had several amusing stories to tell; I smile when I turn to find something in the yellow pages now. However, putting all those stories aside, it was the poetry of the glass we had seen that day that filled my head as I went to sleep that night.

**SUNDAY** It was the vast majority of the conference who were to join together for the extra day. I was intrigued to see Paolozzi's window at St Mary's Cathedral. The starkness and glare of the colours radiating from the window, unmodulated by the absence of paint, almost overpowering the space and exaggerated by the bright early morning sun streaming in, received a mixed reaction. I think I

enjoyed the beautiful pools of dappled light cast by the window across the stone and woodwork and listening to the very atmospheric piece that James Macmillan composed for the unveiling of the window and which Douglas had played to us on the coach perhaps more than the window itself! Our next port of call was at Dean Parish Church in Edinburgh. Here something very different with Douglas' partition screen and window 'A meeting of waters', which cleverly facilitates and provides a contemporary way of dividing up the rear area of the church and gives a wonderful focus of colour in the painted, stained, enamelled, etched and gilded glass appliqué. Next we visited the Mansfield Traquair Centre, the former Catholic Apostolic Church in Edinburgh and saw the restored work, a vast, ambitious and incredibly rich mural scheme, carried out by Edinburgh's leading Arts and Crafts artist Phoebe Anna Traquair. After we had seen Douglas' two-piece glass installation at Baillie Gifford's offices in Edinburgh we moved on to see his windows at St Philip's Church, Joppa. Here I enjoyed the boldness, the use of colour and shape and the freedom and texture in the painting. (I even have to admit that the 'greenness' of paint and carpet grew on me too.) We then had a marvellous lunch provided by the church, which was most welcome. It was then a quick sprint down to the beach for a few moments of paddling, the mist suddenly lifting from the beach, before we were back to the bus to continue our tour. For me Sadie McLellan's wonderful windows in the Robin Chapel proved to be one of the great highlights of the conference. They are tremendously strong, a graphic scheme of the Pilgrim's Progress steeped in blues and saturated reds, full of meticulous detail and texture and harmonious colour. Again time ran out and it was time to move on to our final ports of call. The Rosslyn Chapel was next. Having heard so much about its uniqueness and beauty, I was intrigued to visit and prepared to part with the full entry fee! I was not disappointed but delighted that it was not overrun with the number of tourists (though in effect that was all we were) I had feared. The beauty of the carvings was obvious and I found it an intriguing place. But one has to wonder whether in the rather commercial bid to raise funds for restoration and conservation the very essence of the place, the aura of mystery that seems to surround the chapel, will survive. Then finally it was on to see Douglas' work at St Stephen's Comely Bank Church. Having Douglas with us throughout the day, indeed throughout the conference, and hearing him talk about his native land so passionately and about his work provided a wonderful insight and helped bring everything vividly to life.

For me, and I know a few others, the conference ended with a huge and very fitting bang, as we viewed the magnificent firework display from below the Castle grounds that evening. At the airport the next day I had to smile at the array of tee shirts sporting some of the rather descriptive Scottish 'slang' that I had come across - 'Numptie' has to be the best word for a politician I have ever come across! The vivid memories I have now, as I write just days after the conference, of warm sunny skies, equally warm Scottish hospitality and wonderful, glorious glass, are memories I know which will remain and not diminish with time.

To Sue, and to all those who played a part in helping to organize the conference and offering us their expertise and knowledge, goes very heartfelt thanks. It was superbly planned and the schedule amazingly kept to. It was certainly a most successful event and I look forward to next year with anticipation.

