

HERTFORDSHIRE/BEDFORDSHIRE (16 JULY) This day, organized by Helen Robinson and Andrew Taylor, was one of the best I can remember spending in the company of the BSMGP, despite intermittent downpours, thankfully mainly while we were indoors looking at some stunning stained glass. It was a very full, fascinating day, made even more enjoyable by having with us some of the perpetrators of the glass in question: Caroline and Tony Benyon and Alf Fisher were all members of the party, as was Doris Rollinson who talked about John Hayward's glass.

We began with a visit to St Mary's Church in Luton. This is a lovely church, parts of it dating from the 14th and 15th centuries. The 14C stone font is a rare treasure, but what we had really come to see was Alan Younger's 'Magnificat' window (below) in the south transept, designed and installed in 1979. This is a really beautiful window across five lights glowing with brilliant reds, yellows and blues brilliantly feeding into each other with a blinding white streak in the central light symbolic of the light replacing the darkness. I could have stayed longer than we had time to spare.



From Luton we travelled to Dunstable to visit the Priory. This again is a lovely historic building. Here principally we were looking at the windows designed by John Hayward, which were introduced and described to us by Doris Rollinson. She had some of John's original designs to show as well. His windows were in the Lady Chapel, the south and west aisles too, unmistakably recognizable as Hayward's work, his unique painting style with some lovely subtle colouring (detail below).

From Dunstable we travelled to St Albans, where we spent time in the abbey. Lunch had been organized for us in the cafeteria, which saved queuing and much hassle, but sadly did not live up to Helen's original 5-star expectations. We did not starve, Helen, so don't be too chagrined!



The abbey deserves much longer than we were able to spend in it, naturally, but Alan Younger's great rose window is one of the highlights of any visit here. The colouring and design (detail above) are intricate and subtle and it needs a lot of study, I felt, to fully appreciate it. Here Caroline and Tony Benyon were able to throw light on Alan's thinking and working, and again, when we were looking at their own window in the south aisle of St Columba and the Virgin (installed 2005), it was so interesting to hear the thinking behind the design of the window with its glorious deep colours which positively glowed as opposed to the glare provided by a Burlington & Grylls window alongside!

Next came the only hiccup in Helen Robinson's beautifully organized day. When we got to St Andrew's Church at Cuffley, a modern church set on a hilltop where Alf Fisher had designed and made the windows of Whitefriars fused glass, we were unable to gain entry. Several telephone calls later and after a wait of about 20 minutes we were in. Again it was a real treat to have Alf Fisher to tell us about the windows, the techniques of fusing the glass and the theme of the design. They are a remarkable set of windows. There was also a later leaded window by Chapel Studio, which sits well with the fused windows, although as a strong contrast with them.



Our last visit was to the small church of St Thomas a Becket at Northaw, only a few minutes' drive from St Andrew. Here there were windows by Ward & Hughes, some fascinating Victorian wall paintings, which have been restored recently, more windows by Alf Fisher and, last but by no means least, windows to the entry porch by Helen Robinson. Deceptively simple, I thought they filled a very dark and difficult place allowing light in gracefully and well.

The final icing on the cake to those of us who hadn't previously peeled off to catch trains was a visit to Helen's home for refreshments and cake – also partaken of by the cats when our backs were turned (!) while we visited Helen's studio to see work in progress. This was a truly rewarding day, and all were exceedingly grateful to both Andrew and Helen for their time and effort in organizing everything so smoothly and well. I must also add, the car drivers throughout were so helpful to those of us who had travelled by train, and they also deserve a large thank you.

Frances Funnell