

'A certain kind of memorial window'



My latest venture in stained glass has been of almost 'Dolls House' scale and entirely my fault, since it was I who waxed enthusiastic about the lettering carved into the ancient wall-mounted stone memorials in my local church (St Giles Cripplegate) in the Barbican complex, where Mike and I now live.



Stone memorial that inspired the project

An early medieval church, St Giles continues to serve local residents and visitors with open door, music, praise and prayer. Its present incumbent, Rev Katharine Rumens, is herself an artist and a keen encourager of community participation. Her intention to fit the building for the years ahead inevitably required fund-raising, which in turn suggested the financial contribution of 'memorials'. Stained glass windows perhaps?

Picking up on my enthusiasm for the modest handwrought lettered memorials along the interior walls, she quietly suggested that plaques such as these 'might work' in stained glass. 'The Girl's School', added Katharine, 'want a Memorial for their Centenary. Could you do a stained-glass window for them?' Just a short sentence in interesting lettering and appropriate imagery around the border. All quite small!

I thought (as one does) why not and then what fun to do some research into one of London's earliest schools for girls. But the kindly donor (John Ward, a direct descendant of the founder William Ward) didn't quite see it that way. Simplicity was needed, he felt. Perhaps a laurel wreath would work well with four small scenes suggesting the school and its life. So, together with Katharine, all three of us chose a tiny vignette of the doorway to the first school and another of two girls playing hockey in the straw hats, blouses and long white skirts of that period. For the upper centre we decided upon an 'open book' to represent learning and a 'key' for 'knowledge' at the base.

Vital information (name, date and status) forming the central 'memorial' part of the composition was painted onto an opalescent glass chosen for its responsiveness to light. A border of rich green laurel leaves would surround the glass 'stone' with its memorial text. The glass for this central place in the composition had been selected for its curious resemblance to marble. Being opalescent, its colour would change according to the light level, enabling the written dedication to remain visible by artificial as well as natural light. Truly a stone monument in glass.



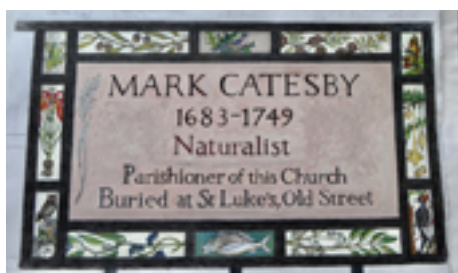
Following the success of the 'Girls School' window, Katharine received a request from an American organisation, 'The Mark Catesby Centre at the University of South Carolina', for a memorial to celebrate the life and work of Mark Catesby (1683–1749), one of the earliest recorders of the flora and fauna of North America. Catesby had been a determined and adventurous observer of birds, plants, insects, fish and animals, which he drew and painted during two visits to North America in 1712–19 and 1723–26. From this personal collection of visual material, he managed to create an important (two-volume) book *'The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands'*.

The book was entirely his own publication, done within the parish of St Giles and published in parts between 1729 and 1747. Printing plates were engraved by him from his own drawings. The thousands of individual prints produced by Godfrey Smith of Spitalfields were then coloured by Mark himself, perhaps with the help of his wife and children. He supervised the book's production over almost 20 years, and personally presented a copy of the first part to Queen Caroline in May 1729. St Giles was his local church, four of his children were baptised here and two of these infants were buried in the churchyard. He and his wife Elizabeth were interred in St Luke's churchyard. A memorial for his life and work would be entirely appropriate here.

David Elliott, Director of The Mark Catesby Centre, took charge of the 'content' of the window by putting me in contact with Charles Nelson, co-editor of the Centre's recent book *'The Curious Mr Catesby'*. Fortunately, Charles understood the predicament of presenting some of Catesby's skilful illustrations within the narrow format of a stained glass memorial. He was well acquainted with Catesby's work and easily able to select an appropriate and interesting group of examples.

Passenger Pigeon was chosen for the head of the window, a gentle bird that was famously hunted to extinction. Others selected were Porgy (a fish), the little Eastern Screech Owl, the Ivory-billed Woodpecker (another extinct bird), the Green Tree Frog and the Spanish Festoon Butterfly. These too were threatened species. The plants that alternate with the animals include the Willow Oak, Bald Cypress, Laurel Greenbrier and Hercules' Club, along with two plants named after Mark Catesby: the red-blossomed Leopard Lily (*Lilium catesbaei*) and the yellow Bahamian Lilythorn (*Catesbaea spinosa*).

Each is featured in this window on glass no larger than 1" x 5" or 1" x 2" or 1" x 3". These slender spaces were just sufficient to allow for the identification of each species.



Mark Catesby cartoon

But light is amazing, expanding the stained-glass version well beyond the known visible limit of the original drawing.



The final memorial in the series is currently still in progress. It was requested by members of the Cromwell Association. To my considerable relief, I was again assigned a mentor in the person of John Goldsmith, Chairman of the Cromwell Association and a former Curator of the Cromwell Museum in Huntingdon. Like Charles Nelson, he has been invaluable in sorting out the right images for all twelve of the spaces around the central inscription commemorating the wedding of Elizabeth Bourchier to Oliver Cromwell on 22 August 1620.

Elizabeth's father (Sir James Bourchier) was a wealthy leather merchant in the City of London. St Giles was his local church. Elizabeth was 22 and Oliver a year younger. While the couple have equal status in terms of the size and arrangement of the lettering, Elizabeth's name appears above that of her husband, since this was her family's church in London.

The border images include Elizabeth's and Oliver's portraits, names, initials, dates and family heraldry, as well as a golden ring and wedding cake to suggest the wedding ceremony and feast. Maps of London, St Ives and Ely (where the couple lived) fill the upper bands, while I have yet to redo the bands of lettering at the base. John Goldsmith continues

Bourchier and Cromwell Wedding cartoon



to help me get the imagery as correct as possible. Later today I shall get the capital 'C' in 'Church' trimmed to the right size; it is currently higher than the 'A' in August. I shall add a 'ring with a stone' to the Cromwell heraldic lion and struggle again with the handwritten extracts from letters to and from Elizabeth and Oliver. John has suggested 'a typeface to match the style of the lettering in the main panel'. The words must be legible from a distance; they are so engaging in their own right. Oliver has written to Elizabeth 'Thou art dearer to me than any creature' and she to Oliver 'Truly my life is but half a life in your absence'. There is still some work to do before the cartoon can be approved and a start made on the glass itself.

Caroline Swash, December 2020

Publications

Brian Clarke: The Art of Light



This book accompanies the artists's exhibition at the Museum of Art and Design in New York (see p. 11), and includes some gorgeous masterpieces of stained glass over the past five decades by Brian, who has consistently pushed the boundaries of stained glass as a medium, in terms of both technology and visual vocabulary. With major installation projects all over the world to his name, he has contributed significant artistic and technical breakthroughs to the thousand-year-old medium. *The Art of Light* reveals his facility with the medium, his appreciation of the long history of stained glass, from gothic decoration to the turn-of-



the-century innovations of Tiffany glass, and is a testament to Clarke's belief that 'stained glass has an authority and potential to deal with every human condition'.

Published in 2020 by Heni Publishing; 284 pp., hb, size 9.5" x 12"; price \$55 online at:

thestore.madmuseum.org/collections/brian-clarke/products/brian-clarke-the-art-of-light?_ga=2.142809533.925971363.1605653212-167921439.1605653212

The store on the MAD site also has a selection of Clarke-themed items, useful for last-minute presents, including scarves, t-shirts and tote bags; see this link:

thestore.madmuseum.org/collections/brian-clarke?_ga=2.115105167.925971363.1605653212-167921439.1605653212

The Saints of Magdalene Church by Ian Stuart and Ed Fisher

This beautifully illustrated booklet is part of a fundraising campaign to preserve the 15C glass of St Mary Magdalen, Wiggenshall, Norfolk, with photography by Ed Fisher. It draws on the extensive researches of David King and others, with extracts (with permission) from King's article on the church's stained glass.

Spiralbound, 85 pp, all-colour illns, £10 donation to the church's restoration fund. To order, contact Ian Stuart on 01553 813730 or ianrachel4@aol.com.

Glorious Glass: stained glass in the Abbey Museum collection by Michael K. Strong

The Abbey Museum holds one of the most significant collections of 14-20C glass in Australia, with nearly 80 panels including from Winchester Cathedral, Lincoln's Inn, Gothic Revival, A&C and 16C continental glass. With a foreword by Sarah Brown, it is profusely illustrated and packed with new research and images not previously published. Pub. Dec. 2020, 296 pp., 423 ill, Abbey Museum, Qld, pb A\$49.90/hb A\$120.