

Review: Restoration drawings for Tewkesbury Abbey at the Society of Antiquaries



On Monday 11 February, a number of BSMGP members, along with the Vicar of Tewkesbury Abbey, the Abbey's archivist, the Chair of the Kempe Trust, the Master of The Glaziers' Company and other interested parties, were invited to the Society of Antiquaries at Burlington House, London, to view an impressive series of coloured drawings of stained glass made by C. E. Kempe & Co. in 1923-4. Recording in detail the famous fourteenth-century windows at the east end of Tewkesbury Abbey, the drawings were undertaken in connection with a programme of careful restoration and re-arrangement.

The skilled artist responsible was Rudolph Tanner, newly employed at the Kempe studio and working under the supervision of Walter E. Tower (then head of the firm) and with the scholarly advice of Gordon McNeill Rushforth. Tanner's watercolour drawings, which were drawn and painted directly onto rubbings of the actual glass (taken on the work-bench after its removal from



Tewkesbury), were prepared in order to assist the Kempe & Co. glass-painters and glaziers in their work of repairing the windows. Doubtless they also served as illustrations for a paper given at the Society of Antiquaries by Walter Tower (who was subsequently elected a Fellow of the Society), and they would have been referred to by Rushforth for his article 'The glass in the quire clerestory of Tewkesbury Abbey' (published in *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society*, xlvii (1924), pp. 289-324).

Following the closure of the Kempe studio in 1934, Tower presented the series to the Library of the Antiquaries, where they joined other material recording historic conservation work. One of the Tewkesbury drawings having recently been displayed in the Society's Council Room, where it attracted considerable interest, Library staff kindly invited BSMGP members and others to examine and comment on the whole series. This was a rare and fascinating opportunity



to study an essential part of the restoration process carried out by Tower and his staff of craftsmen. As well as recording in meticulous detail the coloured glasses, glass-painting and leading, the drawings in some cases indicate alternative suggestions for rearrangement and restoration. It is a testament to the quality of the work carried out by C. E. Kempe & Co. in the 1920s that the windows remain in much the same state as they were when restored at that time. The BSMGP is most grateful to the Society of Antiquaries, and especially Heather Rowland, Head of Library & Collections, and Magda Kowalczyk, Electronic Resources & Serials Librarian, for welcoming the BSMGP group to Burlington House for this special occasion, which was specially organized by our Hon. Librarian, Leslie Smith.

Peter Cormack



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