

Review: spring lecture

Adrian Barlow 'Espying Heaven: the stained glass of Charles Eamer Kempe and his artists'

Charles Eamer Kempe is known to the stained glass world for his studio's prolific output, which continued for decades after his death in 1907, though there are the polarized attitudes towards the 'Kempe style'. The speaker began by quoting some negative comments on the work – for example 'everyone looks as though they've just swallowed a lemon' (James Cameron). However, as he pointed out, not only was Kempe a significant influence on late 19C and early 20C aesthetic style, but also it is difficult to speak of a single 'Kempe style', as this varied between the main artists and craftsmen producing the studio's windows, and also evolved over time.

Drawing on new archive material, he showed examples of windows by the central figures from the Studio's early years: Alfred Edward Tumbleson, his master glazier, and his draughtsmen John Thomas Carter and then Wyndham Hope Hughes, who did much to establish the studio's reputation. At St Cattwg, Llangattock-vibon-Avel, we could see side by side the styles of windows by Hughes and by Carter. Hughes's four-light W window of 1879 depicted eight angel musicians (detail below), alongside Bernard of Clairvaux's hymn 'Jerusalem the Glorious'.



Llangattock-vibon-Avel (Monmouthshire) (1879) angel musician detail (Wyndham Hope Hughes)

Carter's chancel window (1884) was of St Michael and St George, with dragon at his feet, flanked by St Dyfrig and St Cattwg. The speaker pointed out that each Kempe window tells a familiar story slightly differently; for instance, a window to St Margaret of Antioch features a very grumpy dragon.

In the N aisle of St Cattwg is another Kempe studio window (1918) by his third



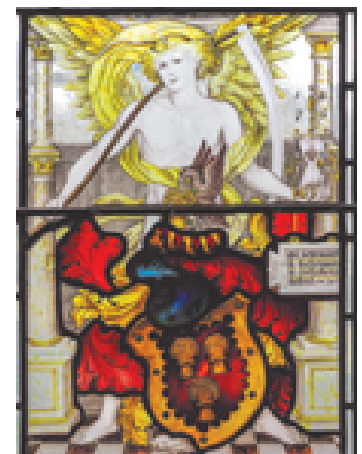
Annunciation (1878) detail, Much Marcle.

draughtsman, John Lisle, who became his chief draughtsman in 1895, after Hughes had departed. Lisle's career spanned the last decade of Kempe's life and the period of CE Kempe & Co., the company set up by Kempe to continue the work of the Studio after his death, the Chairman of which was Walter Tower, Kempe's young cousin and heir. Windows by Lisle include 'Christ breaking down the gates of Hell' at St Michael, Ledbury.

The speaker then turned to consider Kempe's early influences. The writer and diarist AC Benson was a friend; his private diaries revealed that Kempe was strongly influenced by the Fairford windows, with their 'strong, ugly faces', which he had visited while a student of medieval architecture at Oxford. Despite suggestions that Kempe's figures were endlessly 'bleached' and weak in comparison, the speaker pointed out windows by Carter that were examples of very 'strong' faces. After college, Kempe had also travelled widely in France, and was developing a style based on late medieval rather than the earlier (12–13C) medieval style favoured by others. On his return from Europe, he worked on wall and ceiling decoration for the architect Bodley, who lived near his family home at Ovingdean, Sussex, and alongside William Morris and Frederick Leach. Morris was a strong influence on Kempe's early glass, as seen at Selsey All Saints (1861) and West Kirby (1870) where an Annunciation

(made by Tumbleson) has details of angels' fingers and wings borrowed from Morris and the tradition of medieval painting. Later versions of the Annunciation (1877) at St Peter, Clayworth, this time by Hughes, also pick up some of these details, while the flowers in its centre show the influence of Japanese design and the Aesthetic Movement. A third example of this theme at Much Marcle (1878), also by Hughes, shows how his design has been simplified, replacing earlier elaborate backgrounds with a single curtain (left). Other windows at Cuckfield church (1889, Carter) and St Mary, Cambridge (1892, Carter) further illustrate the very different interpretations and evolution of this theme by these artists.

The speaker then described Kempe's life and work at his home at Old Place, Lindfield, a run-down 16C manor which he restored and in which he installed glass such as 'Father Time' (1875) shown as a winged youth brandishing his sickle, astride Kempe's arms and family motto (now at Wightwick Manor, Staffs). The arms contain three wheat sheaves, which Kempe used as his maker's mark, and we then saw the development of this symbol on his glass, with the tower symbol of Walter Tower added after Kempe's death. Another common image in Kempe's glass was a pelican (e.g. the 1882 window by Lisle at Durham Castle); this symbol was dear to him as representing selfless Christian devotion.



'Father Time' (1875), Wightwick Manor

Lastly, the speaker considered Kempe's role in the firm and relationship to his artists. He summed this up by reference to Kempe's Chaucer memorial window (1900) at Southwark Cathedral. Along with the dedication on the 500th anniversary of Chaucer's death, there is an inscription to Kempe 'under whose guiding hand the windows had been executed' – in other words, he said, Kempe's role was essentially to act as such a 'guiding hand' within the firm.