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Ancient Painted Glass in Gloucester Cathedral

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ANCIENT PAINTED GLASS IN GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL.

By C. H. DANCEY.

SOME forty odd years ago, when a young man, I had the very great pleasure of hearing a lecture given by the late Thomas Gambier Parry, of Highnam, in the old Tolzey, upon the "Ancient Stained Glass in the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter."

He said: "In our cathedral there are some relics; and the scraps that still remain in every corner of it, and even in the cloisters, testify to the universal prevalence of this art throughout these buildings."

He also says: "I feel bound to mention here with great respect the good service rendered to this art by Mr. Waller, the architect, in rescuing numerous relics of old glass, most of which have been subsequently worked up into the windows by modern glass painters invariably in those places to which these pieces belonged, *i.e.* where those places were known, in many parts of the cathedral, but pre-eminently in the third and fifth windows in the north wall of the north aisle of the nave, which are nearly half of ancient glass."

In 1867 and following years the great general restoration of the cathedral buildings was begun, and the two windows in the north aisle, containing the old glass, were entrusted to Messrs. Hardman, of Birmingham, to restore, re-lead the old, produce and fix new glass in places from where the old was lost. This they did, the new work being a good and faithful match of the old, both as to colour, style of figures and dress, as well as the make of the glass. Unfortunately the faces of the angels with the censers have not stood the test of time, the painting of these having faded away. This is caused by the glass not being sufficiently heated in the

kiln, where the surface of the metal (glass) is melted enough to admit the colouring matter into, and so become a component part thereof.

In continuing Mr. Parry says: "The two most important relics we possess are the east windows of the choir and of the Lady Chapel. The great east window is the earlier of the two. Mr. Winston, certainly the first authority on the subject, assigns from 1347 to 1350 as the date of the glass."¹

A great deal of the mischief done at different times in our minster has been put down to the account of the Puritans of the seventeenth century, but with little authority I think.

Mr. Parry says: "The preservation of this window through the troublous times of the Siege of Gloucester is probably rightly assigned to the care of Governor Massey and Alderman Pury the younger, an influential Parliamentarian, a man of cultivated tastes, who, with his friend Sir Matthew Hale, established the library in the Chapter House."

There was but one other window in which the ancient glass remained complete to modern times, and of that not one scrap remains. The subject of the glass in this, the west window of the choir, was the "Blessed Trinity." It had escaped the ravages of time and revolutions, but it so scandalised Prebendary Fowler, afterwards Bishop of Gloucester, that he obtained an order from the Chapter for its removal, and in the account which he has given us of his proceedings—which have a touch of the comic about them, this grave dignitary scrambling up ladders and over the roof of the nave to reach the object of his animosity—he states plainly "that he smashed it with his own hands, June 23rd, Anno Domini 1679." No Puritan's doing this!

The Lady Chapel must have been a gem of the greatest beauty, worthy of the glorious cathedral to which it is attached, with its walls and windows rich with colour

¹ For particulars of the great east window of Gloucester Cathedral see Winston,

and sculpture, its altar and reredos more beautiful than all. The glass in this chapel is of a later style (A.D. 1470), and altogether different from that of the choir (1347-50). Most of the windows still retain in the heads of the panels the upper parts of canopies in painted glass, which suggest their treatment to have been of single figures standing upon bases similar to those carved in stone, and fixed against the wall in the panels adjoining the windows. The figures are probably those of saints, martyrs, church dignitaries, kings and persons connected with sacred history. The figures in the vestibule, north and south side windows have all been destroyed, as have also those in the side chapels and singers' gallery.

The east window was doubtless a gem of great and marvellous beauty. The relics are very rich and interesting, although it is glazed in a very slovenly and loveless manner, with mere relics of its ancient splendour. As we see it now it is a "kaleidoscope of heterogeneous" pieces, scarcely any of which remain in their original places, except the glass in the traceried heads above the springing lines. These are the tops of the canopies that were over the figures that stood in the square lights below.

There have been many ways of accounting for the destruction of this glass, although the greatest blame is, of course, assigned to the Cromwellians. I think much may be charged to the followers of Cromwell, but not Oliver Cromwell. It was much more likely Lord Thomas Cromwell, the minister of Henry VIII, when at the dissolution of religious institutions everything in the shape of figures were destroyed. Or if of precious metals or jewels, so as to be of some monetary value, these were taken away and sold to persons of a religious mind, who would purchase such articles in hopes that times might change, and that they might be re-instated in their places as of old. Such things have taken place in one of the churches in our city, as the parish accounts of this date still in existence show.

There is further information in the "Acts of the Chapter," in which it is stated:—

"Whereas a quantity of painted glass has been stolen from the east window of the cathedral. Ordered, that a reward of fifty guineas be offered for the discovery and conviction of the offenders. June, 1798."

There are other acts of vandalism that could be related as to the loss and destruction of the beautiful old stained glass that sheds "the dim religious light!"

In 1893 the restoration of the Lady Chapel was undertaken. This was proceeded with carefully and surely, under Mr. Waller and the usual workmen of the cathedral. I was invited by Mr. Waller to see to the re-leading of the old plain glass in the windows, while the whole of the painted glass was entrusted to my care, to personally re-lead and reinstate, as far as possible in their original place, the many pieces of coloured glass that had been misplaced and mixed up among the old plain greenish metal that had been used in these windows. This was very fortunate, as the many scraps so found enabled me to compare, and to complete, the vacant places from which those pieces had been removed. This task was to me one of pleasure and love, to be enabled to do something of use towards the preservation of these relics of the old glass painters' art.

The third window from the east end of the south aisle was commenced June, 1893. When the dirt, mortar, cement, and slate that had been put to stop the many holes had been removed the following figures were found. Some of them are most artistically drawn, and in a fair state of preservation. These had a band, or label, upon which the names of each was placed, such as Icayas, Abacuc, Daniel, Matathias, Joel, Micheas, etc. The glass is of the make known as "Crown" glass, the selvage or outer rim still remaining on many of the pieces. The glass is of a greenish white tint, very uneven in thickness, varying from $\frac{1}{12}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, its surface in many parts is irregular and curved, more particularly in those pieces

that have the yellow stain burnt in it. The cause for this seems to arise from being laid carelessly upon the beds when placed in the oven for firing. But all the peculiarities or defects, as well as the coarseness of the glass, the many small lumps and air blobs that this old glass is so full of, give it that very beautiful and gem-like appearance that is so much admired. As you view the old windows the light is reflected through these prism-like irregularities with increased beauty and effect. The colours are more glowing and varied. Again, the surface of the glass that is exposed to the action of the weather becomes in time eaten away, more or less, in a multitude of small holes, and in some cases the surface of the glass is off altogether. Where this occurs it deadens or dulls the luminousness of the glass, and thereby gives the appearance of a silvery look. Now this "eating away" rarely takes place where the yellow stain has been burnt in, consequently this, being surrounded by the white glass that has been so denuded of its clear surface, becomes more brilliant in effect.

The figures are drawn upon the white glass with a dark brown stain in the lines, the yellow stain being artistically applied at the required parts.

The ruby glass of these windows is much less streaked than the earlier make of ruby. It is not so rich and deep a tone. The shading is a brown enamel, and not being fused or amalgamated with the glass, does not appear so brilliant as the earlier ruby.

The blue glass, also, is not of that rich tone as is the earlier. The colouring of the old glazing in the windows of the cathedral is evenly balanced by the ground or spaces not occupied by painted or coloured glass of the subjects, these being in alternate openings filled with ruby in one and the next with blue.

Among the many scraps that were found in the old glazing there were several instances of Early English, also Decorated, ruby and blue, and many painted pieces were

inserted in these windows. In all probability these came out of the nave or choir windows. A peculiar and rare piece of ruby is in one of the small "eyes," under the quatrefoil that is in the traceried transom over the bottom row of lights in the third window from the east end, on the south side. It is a centre, or bull's-eye. This is very instructive, in considering the adopted mode of making coloured glass, and very conclusive that it is of the make known as "Crown." This shows how the workman first had the white metal (glass) hot, and then dipped his "punt" into it. Then he rounded it up, and while hot he dipped it into the ruby metal, and with the two metals hot he turned or "trundled" the "punt" upon which the glasses were fixed, in a similar way in which a person would use a mop, thus distributing the two metals together over the whole, which had become by the rotary motion a "table of glass." The "punt" is then removed from the glass at the centre spot, which forms the bull's-eye, and from which it had been "trundled." This eye, or centre, is of course much thicker at the punt than at the outer parts. This thickness occurs to each of the metals, ruby and white. From which thickness we learn the fact that the colouring matter in the ruby is so intense that it would appear opaque if formed into a sheet by itself of the usual thickness of ordinary glass, instead of being "flashed" or coated over one side of the white metal.

Blue glass can be, and was always, used as "pot metal," that is the same colour glass (or metal) all through.

In some of the quatre-foils in the transoms there are flaming stars or suns, the "Rose en Soleil" (a Yorkist badge) finely-drawn monograms, I.H.C. M. (Mary). These are crowned. The outer circles are leaves shaded upon ruby or blue glass alternated. In one or two instances a green glass is used. Much of the glass is badly broken, and in some parts gone. Where this is so I have not tried to hide the loss altogether, but have filled in the spaces with other coloured glass that was found in the body of the windows in

such a manner as to harmonise with the colour and design.

Some of the lights in the transoms had the original lead around the old glass. This was so decayed and corroded with dirt that very little metal (lead) was left.

The centre light of the tracery of this window contained a very good specimen of the canopy work. The details are fine and bold, and the colouring well and evenly balanced. In all probability there was a figure under the canopy, but there is not a vestige of the original glass left to give any clue as to who it was. On each side of this centre light, in the long, narrow opening, there is a large portion of the old work remaining. The figure on the left is nearly perfect. It is a well-depicted angel in the act of singing from a score of music, and looking to the centre. The figure on the right is nearly as perfect, and forms a good companion. This also is looking towards the centre. The scrolls borne by these two angels bear the square or diamond-shaped notes of the fifteenth-century music. This was inspected by Mr. C. Lee Williams, the organist, who pronounced it as fictitious music.

On the right side of the angel there are remains of one other figure, holding in its right hand something in the shape of a small boat (? perhaps St. James). The companion opening on the left side of the window is filled with miscellaneous pieces of old glass.

The whole of the foliated heads of the lights in this window contain coloured, and in most instances the original, glass in its ancient site. As to the figures or subjects which occupied the spaces beneath the replaced canopies there is no knowledge to hand. One thing has been considered in the re-leading of these windows—to replace all the old coloured glass in the heads and tracery of the several windows in their original place and position, thereby leaving these splendid relics of the old glass painters' art to be copied and continued in design, tone and colour, when future generations

may desire to add to the beauty of this lovely fifteenth-century chapel by placing new coloured glass to suit and match the old in the square spaces in the windows now occupied by plain glass, and thus for ages to come retain and pass on to coming generations these gems of Perpendicular glazing.

The above details of the No. 3 window will apply in a great degree to the rest of the side windows in this chapel. There are, however, some little differences in the glazing. The small, circular panels with a square corner contain some really clever artistic drawings of monsters, many of which were badly broken. These are in the corresponding positions opposite to the heads of Daniel and the other prophets.

The late Rev. Herbert Haines, in his valuable guide to the cathedral, published in 1867, describes the glass in these windows, and says: "In the window above the North Chapel is a figure of Christ with crown and thorns and uplifted hand." Alas! this was not there when the restoration was begun in 1893. Oh, would that it had been! What pleasure the re-leading and re-placing of this beautiful emblem of our salvation would have given! Where could this have gone to, and so recently?

In the windows on either side of the vestibule there are some good examples of canopies and also some Tudor roses surrounded with leaves. These are in the small quatrefoils, and are very pleasing. One of these, on the south side and nearest the east, was badly broken. It is only $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. in diameter, and was smashed into fourteen pieces. These were leaded together, and are still to be seen in the original position, thus illustrating the motto, "It is never too late to mend."

In the Chantry Chapels there are some rare and beautiful relics, particularly the architectural portions, such as Crown in Glory, Rose in Soleil, Portcullis (the Beaufort badge) and others. There are also some fine remains reinstated in the two singing galleries.

After the windows and the groined roof had been done, and the scaffolding removed from inside the building, then commenced the pavement. This work necessitated the removal of the gravestones in order to concrete over the graves and vaults beneath. In the soil were found many tiles, these being part of the old heraldic mediæval floor. These tiles were removed when the graves were made and not replaced in order to leave room for the modern monumental slabs now to be seen. Feeling in this work, as in all others connected with our glorious old minster, a great anxiety for the well doing thereof, it induced a daily visit to watch the progress and mode of procedure. It was during one of these visits that I saw something brilliant in the earth, and upon looking into it found that it was a bit of freshly-broken glass. Thinking that more might be there, the earth was sieved, and all likely-looking lumps carefully put aside. Besides these a large number of tiles and parts of tiles were found, and these have been replaced in the relaid floor. The result was that many bits of glass were unearthed, and sufficient found to cause the idea and raise the questions, Where did it come from? How did it get there? and last of all, What could be done with it?

In order to answer these queries it was necessary to remove the dirt from the surface. This proved no easy task, it having become nearly a part of the metal itself. When this was done the lines and bits of figures, as well as the colour and make of the glass, fairly indicated that it was of a date anterior to the present chapel of Abbots Hanley and Farley (1457-99). The ruby and blue belonged to the late Early English or Early Decorated Period, *c.* 1400. The few bits of ruby so rescued are really good examples of streaked glass of that time, whereas the painted glass is traceable to the Decorated style by the yellow stain in its leaf-like pattern. Now as to the query, Where did this glass come from? In order to assist in the answer it is worth considering what building stood upon the site previous to the present beautiful

edifice, erected in the reign of Edward IV, whose badges are so freely used in the windows.

Ralph de Wylington and his wife Olympias gave to the Abbey of St. Peter the funds for building a chapel in honour of Our Lord's Mother. This structure was erected by Helias, the architect and also sacrist of the abbey, in 1225. This building was taken down about 1457, and the present chapel commenced. May there not be sufficient reason to believe that these relics of early glass once adorned the chapel of the De Wylingtons, becoming embedded in the earth at its demolition? The same zeal which led to its discovery found also a means to preserve it for futurity. It is now carefully releaded, and made to fit the three topmost panels in the entrance vestibule windows on the north and south sides. The earlier glass is on the north side. Long may it remain to admit light into the present beautiful chapel, where it had been buried so long.

There are some tops of canopies releaded and reinstated in the Boteler Chapel. This is fifteenth-century glass.

There is no ancient coloured glass remaining in the choir with the exception of the marvellous display in the large east window. The east windows of the clerestory of the north and south transepts contain some beautiful remains of the old glass, *circa* 1300 A.D., consisting of white scrollwork of vine leaves, etc., on a ruby ground in the heads and plain quarries with simple borders the quarries having lines partly around them, some also having a pattern in the centre. These remains were carefully restored by Hardman. The nave windows were in days of yore resplendent with beautiful colours, shedding their softened rays as the sun passed round the grand old Norman structure, although later tracery was inserted in the windows as time and necessity required.

There are still some fragments and remains in the north aisle which have been zealously dealt with with partial success. The clerestory windows contain a large quantity

of the coloured borders, consisting of beautiful yellow crowns, grounded with fine ruby corners. These borders ran round the lights and tracery, with circles, medallions, roses and stars, the quarries being ornamented with designs in the centres. The third window from the west on the north side is restored to the original design. There are some fragments in the window westward of this still in its old leads, not as yet having been interfered with. The glass of the upper east windows of the south transept (*circa* 1330) consists of white scrollwork of vine leaves, etc., on a ruby ground in the heads, and plain quarries, with simple pattern and borders below. These have been restored by Hardman, to whose care was also entrusted the corresponding windows of the north transept, the work being faithfully carried out.

The south-west window of the north transept contains some of the old white quarries with a stained pattern on them, as also some of borders of crowns on ruby ground. These were found mixed up with the modern plain glass in a promiscuous manner. These rare items were carefully gathered up and new leaded and restored to their original positions by the writer when the plain clear glass was leaded (*circa* 1880).

The ancient residence of the abbots of the Monastery of St. Peter was restored in 1863 to somewhat the same appearance as we see it now. The building required a very large overhauling owing to the great neglect of the several exalted personages who had inhabited the premises during the last centuries of its existence. The effect of time upon the structure, and the very slovenly manner in which the reparations had been done, had left a very expensive and difficult work to be accomplished. As the work proceeded many discoveries were made, particularly of old and beautiful remains of the original and traceried windows which had been blocked for unknown time; in all probability since the dissolution of the monastery, and during the occupation of

the several deans of the cathedral who had succeeded the abbots and priors of the abbey.

There was also laid open to view a rare and interesting item in the shape of a mediæval stone lantern. This was built into, and projected from, the stone wall of the old stairs. It is three feet in height, eighteen inches in width, and eleven inches in depth. This unusual find forms part of Mr. F. S. Waller's "Notes and Sketches of Gloucester Cathedral." It has five openings at the sides, all of which had apparently been filled with horn, as the grooves for its reception remained when discovered. There were in the centre opening two thin plates of horn, fastened together by two small studs. These have been taken away. In the centre of the bottom inside there is a hole to receive the candle, and in the top cover there are two openings for the escape of smoke.

In the relics and remains of the discovered windows there were some scraps of coloured glass, all of which were carefully laid aside for the time being. These were subsequently entrusted to me to deal with. I was at the time laying the new leads on the roof of the deanery at the restoration of that edifice.

I was fortunate to find that these fragments had once formed part of an Edwardian painted window. The shield bearing the arms of Edward III surrounded with the purple garter, the motto, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," in yellow, with gems of ruby and emeralds. These were re-leaded together, and so saved, and now fill up the centre opening of the octofoil in the tracery of the large window in the entrance hall of the deanery. The outer circles are filled with the remaining fragments that were found in the different windows, and thus used to surround the rare and good glass in the shield, in order to preserve it from being utterly lost.

It is a matter of history that when a boy Edward III was often at Gloucester with his father, Edward II, and after

the burial of his parent he visited the grave and gave rich gifts to the abbey. May he not have stayed at the abbot's lodgings when on such visits ?

It was by this monarch that the Order of the Garter was instituted. May not this glass have been painted by the craftsmen of the abbey as a memorial of such visits ? It was usual to insert arms of such distinguished guests after honouring the religious houses by a visit.