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The Great East Window of Gloucester Cathedral

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THE GREAT EAST WINDOW OF GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL.

By G. McN. RUSHFORTH, F.S.A.

(WITH THREE PLATES).

IT might have been thought that the subject of the east window in the quire of Gloucester Cathedral had been exhausted by Charles Winston's important paper of 1863,¹ and Mr. T. D. Grimké-Drayton's valuable notes which I edited for the *Transactions* in 1916.² So far as the history and heraldry of the window is concerned this is probably true. But renewed study of the glass, in preparation for the joint meeting of the Royal Archæological Institute and of our Society in 1921, convinced me that there was still something to be said about the general design of the window, and about the selection and identification of the persons represented in it. The pages which follow embody most of what I said to members of the two societies assembled in front of the window on July 16th, 1921.

With Mr. Winston's paper before us, it is unnecessary to dwell on the fact that the window forms a landmark in the history of English glass-painting, for it is the first example, as well as being one of the grandest, of a window filled with tiers of full-length figures, which are so characteristic of the fifteenth century. Finished probably by 1350, and filled with glass which in style is strictly faithful to the 'Decorated' or fourteenth century tradition, the stone framework belongs to the new or 'Perpendicular'

¹ Reprinted from the *Archæological Journal*, xx (1863), pp. 239-253, 319-330, in Winston's *Memoirs Illustrative of the Art of Glass-Painting* (London, 1865), pp. 285 ff.

² Vol. xxxviii.

type, which so favoured the scheme of canopied single figures, not only by the vertical lines of the mullions and tracery lights, but also by the new device of the transom, which seemed naturally to create tiers of panels exactly suited for full-length figures. The new architectural setting, combined with other artistic influences, resulted in a great improvement of painted glass, both in draughtsmanship and tone; and by the end of the fourteenth century windows were being produced, exhibiting all the clearness and delicacy of colour, and beauty and refinement of drawing, in which the best work of the fifteenth century was so pre-eminent. But as yet, except for the presence of an unusual amount of white glass and a general lightness of effect, there is no trace of all this in the original glass of our window, which is mainly interesting as indicating one of the principal forms which window design was to take in the future.

The structure of the window is the first thing that calls for notice. We observe that the largest possible area for glass has been obtained. The designer was not content with the normal space provided by the extreme width of the quire, but has increased it (1) by deflecting outwards the side walls of the easternmost bays, north and south; (2) by making the window a bow, so that it almost suggests a triptych with its hinged wings coming slightly forward on either side of the central portion (fig. 1). The window is also carried down nearly to the floor, though the central portion of the lowest part forming the entrance to the Lady Chapel was not glazed.

The idea of a triptych, just mentioned, may help us to realize the pictorial design of the window. Looking at it as a whole, and, so far as possible, thinking away or forgetting the stone framework, we may fancy it as a great coloured triptych of tiers of canopied figures, the central portion, as is sometimes the case with triptychs, rising higher than the wings; the whole set against a

background of pale quarry-work which fills up the rest of the window above and below. Winston's diagram (pl. I), where the coloured parts are shaded, brings this out very well.¹

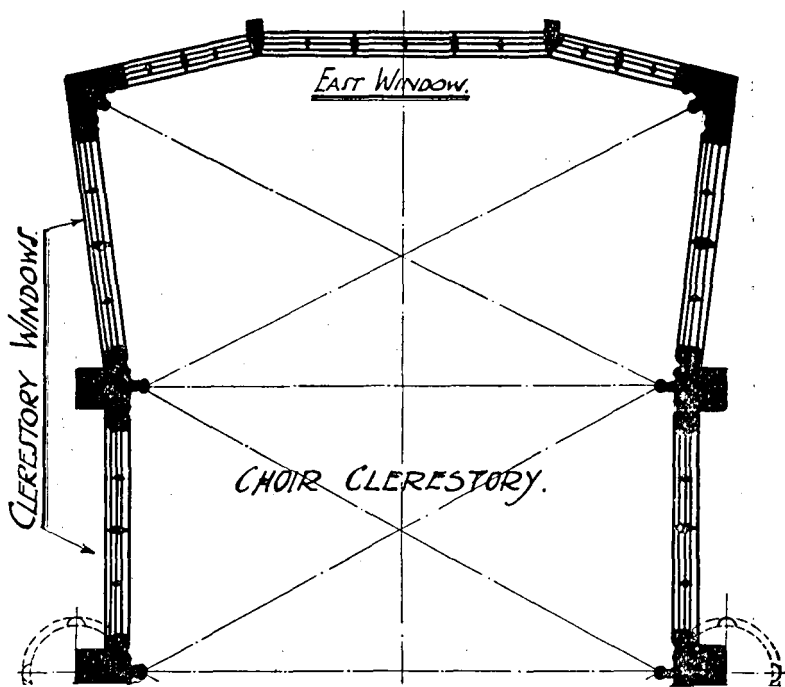


FIG. I.—EAST WINDOW, GLOUCESTER CATHEDRAL.
Horizontal Section at the Clerestory Level.

The quarry background was nothing new, for it often appears with the single rows of canopied figures which are a frequent feature of 'Decorated' windows; but it is used here on a larger scale and with bolder effect. There was a special reason why the three lowest tiers of lights are filled with it, the coloured figure-panels stopping with the fourth tier from the bottom. Whatever the form of the

¹ The numbers and capital letters within brackets in the following account refer to this diagram.

old thirteenth century Lady Chapel may have been,¹ its body and roof must have interfered with the transparency of the lowest part of the window, just as the present one does; and painted figure-subjects would have been almost thrown away there. The pale quarries, however, are but little affected. There is reason to think that the lowest section of the east window in Great Malvern Priory Church was filled with quarry work for a similar purpose.

The quarries, a very large number of which survive, are delicately ornamented with a star design; and in some cases the monotony of the background is relieved by decorative insertions. Thus the three principal tracery openings in the head of the window had gold flaming stars, though the central one has been destroyed by the insertion of the fifteenth century figure of St. Clement. The four corresponding openings in the tracery heads of the two wings are relieved by ornamental roundels. On the same principle, the quarry lights under the lowest tier of figures were varied by the series of roundels and heraldic shields, which form a sort of 'predella' to the triptych. As there are no inscriptions of any kind in the glass—not even the names of the persons represented—the shields provide the chief evidence for dating the glass, with tolerable accuracy, shortly before 1350.

So much for the scheme or general design. Next as to the contents of the 'storied' part of the window. The subject, as has often been pointed out, is the Coronation of the Virgin; for though we have only tiers of isolated figures, we must conceive of the whole as a single composition in which that medieval symbol of the consummation of the drama of Incarnation and Redemption—the enthronement of Mary as Queen of Heaven, is attended by the apostles and saints of the Church in glory, as well as by the founders and most eminent representatives of the

¹ See Canon Bazeley's *Notes on the Early English Lady Chapel in Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, iii, pp. 12 ff.

Abbey of Gloucester. In principle, though the form is somewhat different, the subject and its treatment is the same as that of such well-known pictures as the almost contemporary triptych in the National Gallery,¹ which goes under the name of Orcagna, and the later versions of the theme by Fra Angelico in the Louvre² and Fra Filippo Lippi in the Accademia at Florence,³ not to speak of many other works.

Above the central group of Christ and Mary enthroned (17, 18) are three pairs of angels holding palms of triumph (5-10). The second from the left has been lost and replaced by a fifteenth century Madonna from some other window. The figures on the same level (F) as the central group represent the twelve apostles. As may be seen from the arrangement of those on the left, whose places have not been changed, they were not in pairs facing one another, but were grouped on a different principle. Peter and Paul stand on either side of the central throne, turned towards it; and the four apostles in each of the wings looked in the same direction; but the uniformity is broken and the wings are connected with the centre by the intermediate apostle on either side, who turns towards the outer group. The four outermost apostles on the south side have disappeared with the exception of the feet of the last two, and have been replaced by four kings, about whom we shall have something to say later. But I think we can trace the remains of these missing apostles elsewhere. The lower half of one of them seems to have been used to replace the lower part of the Christ in (18), originally, no doubt, a seated figure like Mary. Another may be recognised in the cut-down and patched figure in the last light but one of the tier below (37). He is looking the right way for an apostle in this group (*i.e.* to the left),

¹ No. 569, Reinach, *Répertoire de Peintures*, ii, p. 524. Forty-eight saints in five rows or tiers kneel on either side of the central group with its attendant angels.

² Layard-Kugler, *Italian Schools of Painting*, i, pl. facing p. 130.

³ Reinach, *Rép. de Peint.*, iii, p. 505.

and the treatment of the face and beard is just like that of the other apostles, e.g. the one in (13). His large purple hat suggests James the Great (pl. II), who was beginning to be represented as a pilgrim in the fourteenth century.¹ If so, for the usual scallop shell badge of the pilgrimage to Compostella there has been substituted a small picture of the face of Christ set in the front of the hat.² Perhaps this is intended for the badge of the still more important pilgrimage to Rome, represented by the portrait-bust of Christ in the apse mosaic of the Lateran, the premier church of the Catholic world, which, in medieval legend, reproduced a miraculous apparition of the Saviour at the original consecration of the basilica.³ I am also inclined to think that the much damaged figure on the same tier, holding a green club (35), is another apostle, probably meant for Simon. James the Less (13) is holding his club or fuller's bat in just the same position. The modern head has been turned the wrong way. With the exception of two in the left or north wing, who have no distinguishing emblems (11, 13), the remaining apostles are readily identified as (from left to right) James the Less (12), Andrew (14), John (15), Peter (16), Paul (19), and Thomas (20). James the Great no doubt came next in (21).⁴

The tier below (E) was filled by fourteen canonized saints, in pairs turning towards each other. They seem to be arranged on a definite principle. In the left half of the tier, including the central pair of lights, four virgin martyrs alternate with four male martyrs, all being obvious

¹ E. Mâle, *L'art religieux de la fin du moyen âge en France* (Paris, 1908), p. 183.

² I see no ground for Winston's idea that this is a fifteenth century insertion. The treatment of the hair and beard is exactly like that in the heads of the apostles.

³ For the legend see Baldeschi-Crescimbeni, *Stato della Chiesa Lateranense nell' anno 1723* (Rome 1723), pp. 154 ff. Mgr. Wilpert (*Die Römischen Mosaiken* etc., i, pp. 188 ff) suggests that the story originated in the fact that this was the first publicly exhibited portrait of Christ in Rome. :

⁴ In my account of the Lady Chapel east window (*Transactions*, xliii, p. 218) I suggested that a large bearded face in one of the bottom lights might have belonged to this set of apostles. I see now that this is impossible.

choices from their celebrity, and except one, easily identified. They are (from left to right), Caecilia with her wreath of red roses (25), George (26), a virgin whose emblem is lost (27) (Agatha or Agnes are likely names), Edmund King of East Anglia holding two arrows¹ (28), Margaret spearing a dragon (29), Laurence as a deacon with his gridiron (30), Catherine with sword and book² (31), and John the Baptist (32). The last two, of course, have the place of honour in the centre of the window.

The arrangement of the remaining saints on the right is different, and their identification is conjectural. All the surviving figures are men, but there seems to have been an alternation here too, one of each pair being, perhaps, a king. Though the head of the first (33) is lost, the right hand raised in blessing and the staff held in his gloved left hand show that he is a bishop, or at least an abbot, perhaps St. Benedict, or Dunstan, or even Thomas of Canterbury. His companion (34) has also lost his head, and the figure is in hopeless confusion. If he were a king, the sword in his left hand might suggest Oswald, whose relics were believed to be at Gloucester, though not in the abbey church.³ Otherwise it might be St. Alban, or some military saint. The left hand figures of the next two pairs have disappeared and been replaced, as suggested above, by two apostles (35 and 37). Of their companions, the first (36) is undoubtedly a king holding a sceptre, perhaps Edward the Confessor. The other king in the last place (38) is certainly an alien insertion, for he is on a larger scale than the figures of this window. But it is not

¹ The two arrow-heads are distinct, and no doubt the feathered ends of the shafts were so also, but only the lead outline is left, so that, at first sight, there seems to be a single arrow.

² The absence of the wheel is very unusual, though not unprecedented. The lowest part of the figure is confused, but there are no traces of the wheel, and no foundation for the assertion in *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, iii, p. 10.

³ William of Malmesbury *Gesta Pontificum* (Rolls Series, p. 293). Leland, *Itinerary* (ed. Toulmin Smith), ii, p. 62. *Transactions*, xliii (1921), pp. 88, 128. *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, ii, p. 96.

unlikely that he was put here as a substitute for a shattered king, who was the original occupant.

We now come to the third tier of figures (D), where the absence of nimbs shows that we have to do, not with saints, but with historical personages, presumably connected with the abbey. The place of honour in the centre was occupied, apparently, by two kings, but the one on the right has been replaced by a St. Edmund with his arrows (46), who is an intruder, as the larger scale of the figure shows. The six figures to the left (39-44) are, as before, in pairs with an alternation, in this case of mitred bishops, presumably of Worcester, and tonsured ecclesiastics holding croziers, therefore abbots, presumably of Gloucester. It may be remembered that the mitre was not granted to them till many years after the date of this window.¹ The lights to the right apparently also had an alternation, but the figures are mostly in a ruined state. The bishops and abbots wear alternately the mass vestments and the cope, but for variety the first two pairs are, so to speak, counterchanged, so that we get the series: cope (39), chasuble (40), chasuble (41), cope (42), chasuble (43), cope (44). On the south side the vestments of only two have survived, viz. the mass vestments for the bishop in (49), and the cope for the abbot of (50), which looks as if the system was reversed on this side, unless the figures have been moved. The bishop's mitre survives in (51), and perhaps there are the remains of the lower part of another abbot in (48), the upper part being made up with the remains of a king holding a lance. The king in (47) is, like St. Edmund, on a larger scale, and therefore an importation. The condition of the figure at the end of the row (52) does not allow of any decision as to its character.

Though, as we have noticed, no names are inscribed below the figures of the window, these persons were

¹ In the time of Abbot Walter Frocester (1381-1412). *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, ii, p. 152.

intended to represent definite individuals; and when the glass was put up there must have been some record or other clue by which they could be identified. Perhaps it was to be found in 'certayne writyns in the wall of the northe ile of the body of the church' from which Leland drew his information about the founders and benefactors of the abbey.¹ Keeping his notes before us, we may attempt to make a list of possible names, even though we cannot hope to identify every individual. We may begin by supposing that the two kings in the central places of honour are founders. If so, the one to the left (45) might be Osric, the original founder in 681; while the other, perhaps the fragmentary figure with a spear now in (48), might be Canute who introduced the Benedictines (1022), or William the Conqueror or his successor, under whom the abbey was revived and rebuilt by Serlo. But perhaps we ought not to exclude the possibility that one of them represents Edward II who, like Osric, was buried in the quire, and whose local reputation as a quasi-saint was at its highest about this time. It was from one of those inscriptions painted on the nave wall, mentioned above, that we learn, through Leland, that the new work of the quire and south aisle was paid for by offerings made at his tomb.² He might well be the bearded king in 45 (pl. III), holding sceptre and orb, just like his recumbent effigy close by.³

The bishops of Worcester represented will be those specially associated with the vicissitudes of the church. There are six to be accounted for. Once more we learn from Leland's use of the 'writyns in the wall' that it was

¹ *Itin.*, ii, p. 59; v. 156. *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, i, p. 141.

² *Itin.*, ii., p. 60.

³ Though there can be no doubt that this figure belongs to the series, the treatment of the face and brown beard is quite individual and unlike that of the other bearded figures. It may therefore be intended to suggest a portrait. The orb is surmounted by a tall plain 'Latin' cross. It may be noted that the crown is of the same type as that above the modern head in (48), but rather richer.

by the counsel of Bishop Bosel that Osric founded the church, and by that of Wulstan that Canute brought in the Benedictines. It was Bishop Aldred who in 1058 almost refounded the monastery and rebuilt the church. It was in the time of the sainted Wulstan II that Serlo reformed the house, and began to build the church that we see to-day; and it was consecrated by Bishop Sampson in 1100. The sixth place may have been filled by the bishop of the day, probably Wulstan of Bransford who died in 1349.

In the same way we may try to construct a list of probable abbots for the alternate places. They would not be likely to begin before the Benedictine establishment in 1022, for secular chapters were always looked down upon by their monastic successors. The first abbot of the black monks, Edric, should figure in the series, and his more acceptable successor Wulstan, and certainly Serlo, the Norman builder of the existing church. The abbot contemporary with the window was Adam of Staunton (1337-1351), but it is not obvious how the other places were filled. We have seen that on the south side only one abbot (50) certainly survives. Of the two other places, the figure in (52) is quite unrecognisable, and in the lower half of (48) we find something different. The king with a spear has been made up with the lower half of a figure, not in vestments, but in plain white drapery hanging straight, and apparently holding a staff (or crozier) to which the spear shaft has been adapted.¹ One would like to think that we have here the remains of one of the abbesses of Osric's original foundation, whose names have been preserved by Leland: Kyneburga, the sister of Osric, Edburga, and Eva, all described as queens of the Mercians. We know that they were all buried, with Osric, in the abbey church.²

In conclusion something must be said about the inserted

¹ It will be noticed that the spear shaft is leaded separately, while the staff below is painted on the same pieces of glass as the drapery behind it.

² *Historia et cartularium S. Petri Glouc.* (Rolls series), vol. i, p. 6. *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, iii, p. 12.

figures of kings which we have come across, six in all, of a larger scale than the original figure of the window; and with them we may consider three or four similar kings which we noticed on a previous occasion, in the east window of the Lady Chapel.¹ All are more or less contemporary in style with the glass of the great window; and no better suggestion has been made than Winston's,² that they came from the quire clerestory windows, which their dimensions seem to fit. The painted glass of those windows would naturally be the next work of the kind undertaken after the great window was finished.

It is remarkable that all these figures are kings; and even if we are not obliged to suppose that the series of kings was continued through all the ten windows of the clerestory (implying forty figures), we have to account for and explain even a limited series of the kind. As a matter of fact, such a series of royal figures occurs with tolerable frequency among the imagery of great medieval churches, but the meaning varies. The rows of statues on the west fronts of several French cathedrals represent, as M. Mâle has shown,³ the kings of Judah and the royal ancestors of Christ and the Virgin; and it has been suggested that they also appear on the west fronts of English cathedrals, such as Exeter. But it is not, perhaps, very likely that they would be put in a subordinate position, such as that of clerestory windows, detached from the central subject of the great east window. A more probable suggestion would be that our kings may have belonged to a set of the kings of England: indeed one of them clearly represents the martyred Edmund, king of East Anglia (46). So in the clerestory windows of Rheims Cathedral the kings of France are represented, though there each is accompanied by the archbishop

¹ *Transactions*, xliii, p. 217.

² *Memoirs*, p. 291, note.

³ *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France* (3rd ed.), p. 200.

who crowned him.¹ The subjects of the windows in the cloister at Peterborough were recorded before their destruction, and we are told that the nine windows of the north side had a set of 'all the Kings of England downwards from the first Saxon King' (*i.e.* Peada, the founder). There must have been thirty-six figures in all.² Such a series, beginning with Osric, would very well suit the Gloucester clerestory. But there is another possibility. Among the traditional decorations of great Benedictine churches were portraits of kings who had resigned their crowns to become monks. A record has preserved the inscriptions beneath the figures of eminent Benedictines painted on the screen-work of the altar of St. Jerome and St. Benedict in Durham Cathedral, and among them are the names of twelve emperors and kings (six of them English) who had become monks.³ To give only one later instance—I remember seeing a similar series, painted in the 17th or 18th century, in the nave of the Benedictine church of San Pietro at Perugia.

Now at Gloucester the 'writings' seen by Leland on the north wall of the nave may have included a list of this kind, for the poem about the history of the abbey, composed by Abbot Malvern in the 16th century, and no doubt drawn from that source, contains the names of 'sondry famous kings also of this land' who

'renounced their kingdomes, and gladly tooke in hand
Holy Religion, and became men spirituall.'

Ten names follow (five of them also occur in the Durham list), and the number may have been increased by those of lords, like Roger de Lacy, who followed their example.⁴ Anyway, between them and the English kings, the clerestory windows may have been appropriately filled.

¹ *Mâle*, *op. cit.*, pp. 397 ff.

² S. Gunton, *History of the Church of Peterborough*, pp. 336, 103.

³ *Rites of Durham* (Surtees Soc. ed. J. T. Fowler), pp. 124 ff.

⁴ *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, i, pp. 153, 154.