

Coloured Glass Windows

BY

MAURICE H. RIDGWAY, B.A.

WHEN the precarious nature of the times endangers our national treasures, interest in them frequently increases. This has been particularly noticeable in connection with what is popularly, though not wholly correctly, termed "stained glass;" of all treasures perhaps the most friable. For this reason it has perhaps suffered greatest, and yet it is surprising how much has survived the vicissitudes of seven hundred years. War, iconoclasts, changing taste, indifference and the weather have all taken their toll; and lost glories have not always been restored when windows have been replaced by well-intentioned benefactors. The present very marked interest in coloured glass has been shown and fostered in recent years by the appearance of Dr. Christopher Woodforde's studies in Somerset and Norwich glass, and also by the works, large in size and cost, by Rushforth and Rackham on the Malvern Priory and Canterbury glass respectively. They are delightful books and illustrate admirably how a study of coloured window glass will introduce one to innumerable kindred subjects of equal fascination, for quite apart from the research into the makers and the making of the windows themselves, into it are blended heraldry and hagiology.

Cheshire is not a particularly good county in which to begin a study of coloured glass from existing examples, for it has suffered more than most from wanton destruction and from ill advised erection in more recent years. This does not mean to say however that there are not many specimens of interesting coloured windows hiding in the most unexpected corners of the county, all well worth searching for and examining in detail. If possible, the beginner is well advised first to visit those places which are renowned for their glass. Book learning on the subject cannot supply the thrill experienced when the original is seen in its original setting.

England and France are richest in this peculiarly and distinctively Christian art and of these England is the better blessed, for there is scarcely an early parish church which does not contain at least fragments of early glass which reveal points of considerable interest.

No glass earlier than the 12th century has survived in England, but Canterbury Cathedral is particularly rich in glass of the 12th and 13th centuries. Chartres, Bourges and Le Mans, the

pride of early French glass, have nothing better to show. The Five Sisters Window in the north transept of York Minster presents one with an almost perfect specimen of 13th century grisaille glass. It illustrates the passing desire, some say under the influence of the Cistercians in the north of England, to depart from the rather dark multi-peopled medallions and panels of the preceding period, and to allow more light to stream into the churches through the long lancets provided by Early English architecture. By the end of the 13th century and during the first years of the 14th, considerable changes again took place in the history of glass making and design and also in the development of the architecture which furnished the frames into which the glass was housed. It was an age of healthy experiment and adventure and as such never lacks interest. For glass of this period there are numerous good examples in the country. Merton College, Oxford, and the Latin Chapel of Christchurch, Oxford, Wells, Gloucester and Exeter Cathedrals possess outstanding examples and many parish churches also retain good examples including Eaton Bishop, Herefordshire, S. Denys York, Morpeth in Northumberland, and Tewkesbury.

The latter half of the 14th century witnessed another major change in glass colouring with the advent and growing popularity of a yellow stain which could be painted on to glass, producing for the first time (with the exception of sepia) a colour to share with another the same piece of glass. This had revolutionary consequences, although it was only one of the contributory factors in the change which took place in 14th century work. The Black Death coming in the middle of the century, and the development of what is known as the 'Perpendicular' style of architecture also contributed to the change; the former, with a gigantic social upheaval which produced eventually new wealthy classes who became ready patrons, and the latter, great window spaces shouting to be filled with glass. Here was a conjunction of circumstances, the one assisting the other and producing a most favourable atmosphere for the growth of keen and able glass painters. Their schools were to survive (as at York) for almost two hundred years and to enrich almost every church in the land with their work. The York churches, especially All Saints, still retain in an unparalleled way the rich output of the York glaziers. More fine displays of glass from other centres may be seen at Great Malvern Priory in Worcestershire, Greystoke in Cumberland, Ludlow in Shropshire, All Souls, Oxford, and Gresford in North Wales; whilst Long Melford, East Harling, St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich, and many other Norfolk and Suffolk Churches still display the work of a Norwich school of glass painting. Glass at Cirencester and the Beauchamp Chapel, Warwick, is also famous, and many of the Somerset churches, for example at Orchardleigh and East Brent, serve to illustrate another group in the west country.

All these help to show how late 14th century tendencies reached their logical conclusion during the 15th century. They illustrate also the peculiarities of different schools, and many of them the touch of the master hand in portraiture and setting. Their influence was felt in many parts of England and their products sometimes travelled considerable distances to supply their customers. This accounts for typical York glass being found so far away as the isolated mountain church of Llanrhychwyn in Caernarvonshire.

Cheshire is conveniently situated to enable the Cheshire historian to study the fine glass which remains in North Wales. Much of it belongs to the early years of the 16th century. The east windows of Disserth, not far from Prestatyn, and Llanrhiadr near Ruthin both illustrate different conceptions of the same subject . . . the stem of Jesse. It is an ideal subject for a large east window and has been so used in most centuries. Llanrhiadr is the more complete and represents Jesse the father of David lying at the bottom of the central lights whilst there rises from him in the form of a family tree, the royal ancestors of Christ, with the Virgin Mary, dominating the top of the central light. Apostles, Evangelists and Prophets are usually in attendance. At Disserth (where the apostle group is complete, each one holding an appropriate article of the Creed written on a scroll) the figure of Jesse has been destroyed. The glass in both places illustrates that on the eve of the Reformation new influences were again shaping the treatment of glass design in England. The origin of the glass is still a mystery but the inspiration behind the Llanrhiadr glass at least is from the Rhineland of Europe and probably reached this country through the German woodblocks. Other places in England also have glass which illustrates the influence of foreign glass painters on English work. King's College, Cambridge, and Fairford in Gloucestershire are other examples, both of which seem to show the stamp of the King's Glaziers who were at that time foreigners, probably Flemings.

The unsettled times of reform curbed but no means halted the glass painting industry in England. There was always a ready market for the display of ever popular heraldry both in churches and private houses. It was not the Reformation as much as the introduction of a new and easier method of presenting coloured pictures in windows which did so much to change the face of the art in England and on the Continent. The use of pot metals (glass which receives its colour whilst molten in the crucible) and flashed glass, when separate colours had to be grouped and leaded together to form a picture with only the additional use of line drawing in sepia and enrichment with yellow stain, had called forth the utmost skill in the glazier. It necessitated the

blending of several media, glass, lead, iron, stone, with due consideration for the effects of light. This was now partly discarded. By the discovery and use of coloured enamels the glass painter often became an artist using large panes of clear glass in place of a canvas and so broke with the skilful tradition of previous years. Much glass of this type and period was brought to this country in roundels and panels from the Rhineland and Switzerland by English tourists in the 18th and 19th centuries. Religious houses were passing through hard times and were willing to part with their glass for ready money. Many very large windows came to this country in the same way. St. Mary's, Shrewsbury, and the chancel of Lichfield cathedral both have glass of this description. They are fairly easily recognised when once their character has been pointed out. Cheshire is particularly fortunate in possessing at Birtles, one of the finest collections in the country of this late 16th and 17th century glass, mainly Swiss.

Heraldry, which by its nature avoided the doctrinal controversies of the changing scenes of the Elizabethan age and the 17th century was free to develop and did so, the enamels helping considerably in catering for a more complicated blazon. Though often well drawn, the windows were not too satisfactory because the enamels tended to flake off, many colours looked washed out, and 'gules' (red) an essential colour in heraldry, could not be satisfactorily represented. Yarnton in Oxfordshire offers good work of the early 17th century. Coloured windows were frowned upon by Puritan England which not only discouraged their making but often wantonly destroyed what had survived from earlier and more enlightened centuries.

With the restoration once more of the Anglican Church, came better days, in which glass painting could be fostered and appreciated. The Laudian revival of the early part of the 17th century had during its short life patronised the Dutch enamel men, who with their brilliant colours usually painted animated scriptural scenes on rectangular panes. Oxford is rich in their work. Wadham, Lincoln and Christchurch Colleges have complete windows. English work of this short period follows the Dutch lead but few examples of their work survive, indeed few were executed.

When the civil war and the Protectorate were over, the Dutchmen had left England and for another two hundred years the English craftsmen and painters tried to rebuild the art which for so long had been shamefully treated. Enamel work remained. English glass painters again become popular and Henry Gyles of York was a pioneer in this revival at the end of the 17th century. Interest was lacking at first but increased as the 18th century advanced and produced such men as Joshua Rice (who executed the windows at Whitley Court, c. 1720), William Peckitt

of York (N. Windows at New College, Oxford), and John Rowell (The Chapel of the Vyne, Hampshire, 1770). Both English and foreign artists provided them with the original designs. For example, a Dr. Wall provided Wm. Peckitt with the original for an Oriel College, Oxford, window of the Presentation; Ricci, an Italian, the originals for Joshua Price's work and now at Witley, and Sir Joshua Reynolds a series of full size oil paintings on canvas to be copied on squares of clear glass by Jervais between 1777 and 1782 for the large west window in the ante chapel of New College, Oxford. Some years earlier, William Peckitt also had worked there from designs by Rebecca.

Francis Eginton of Birmingham, though trained under Boulton in Soho as an enameller, began working on glass about 1780, producing what were really transparencies on glass, and became a popular 'glass painter' by the end of the century. Nelson and Lady Hamilton visited his Birmingham studio in 1805 and his son, Raphael Eginton became 'Glass stainer to Princess Charlotte' in 1816. The work of Francis Eginton however, is the better remembered and of this the window of St. Pauls, Birmingham has been regarded as his best work (done in 1791). New changes again took place as the 19th century advanced. Evans of Shrewsbury produced some interesting original work and also supplied a number of reproductions of earlier glass which was being replaced (Winchester College Jesse window and the East window at Ludlow). Unfortunately, the older glass which it replaced was often allowed to be discarded or scattered. It was illustrative of the general attitude towards early glass which had existed throughout the 18th century, when the destruction of most of it took place.

In the next century the researches and labours of Charles Winston and others to drive everything within prearranged moulds resulted in the production of 'period' glass from the works of Warrington, Wailes, Willemont, O'Connor and Messrs. Heaton, Butler and Bayne. It is to some of these persons and others like them that we owe much of the unsuitable, crude and gaudy outpourings commonly associated with Victorian glass. Usually their earliest work is the best. Even these men differed considerably in their capabilities. But when it is realised that Wailes was really a grocer in Newcastle and later employed between 80 and 100 artists in his works to execute the numerous orders he received for windows, one can appreciate how and why the individual touch, had it been worth preserving, had got smothered beneath those of his apprentices.

The 19th century owes a great deal to the Pre-Raphaelites who helped to rescue much of English art from the abyss into

which it had fallen. The Burne Jones and William Morris studios are outstanding at this period.

The latter half of the 19th century also heralded the first of the 'Bells,' Alfred, whose work was linked with Gilbert Scott and later with Clayton with whom he was founder partner of the firm of Clayton and Bell in 1855. Most people are familiar with the name of Kempe. His pupil, H. W. Bryans, was the son of a Cheshire Vicar.

The present century has produced outstanding examples of both good and bad glass painters. The bad should be discouraged and the good supported, for the latter have proved by their work that if given the chance they can match in quality, originality and loveliness, the best that has gone before.

This is the setting into which we must fit the scattered Cheshire remains of early glass and with which we must compare the work of more recent years, and to this end it is best to tabulate certain Cheshire or border examples which the Cheshire historian may wish to locate and examine.

Cheshire has no glass earlier than the 14th century. Of the 14th century the south window of the Boydell Chapel at Grappenhall has an interesting array of glass which however, fails, because of its unfortunate history, to give any idea of the original grouping. There is the recently discovered Annunciation group in the tracery lights of the north aisle east window at Shotwick. Part of the south chancel window at Tattenhall, and fragments at Nantwich (South Chancel) and Marton (West window) also belong to this period.

The best 15th and early 16th century glass in Cheshire is to be found in the west windows of the north and south aisles at Astbury. The fragments in the north came from the clerestory and the early glass in the south is found amongst the tracery lights, some of which are modern, as are the main lights. There is an interesting half figure in the organ screen door at Grappenhall, often overlooked, executed in sepia and yellow stain, and a collection of fragments showing donors, saints, heraldry, and part of an Assumption at Higher Peover. The tracery lights of the west window, south side of the Troutbeck Chapel, St. Mary's, Chester, have four small but complete Saints including deacons. Bramhall Hall Chapel has a three panel representation of the Crucifixion of early 16th century date (on loan but originally from Bramhall). Another earlier Crucifix of the 14th century from here is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Ashton under Lyme (Lancs.) has good glass of this period so also have several churches in North Wales, notably, Disserth, Llanrhianr near Ruthin, Gresford, Nerquis, Hope, Cilcain, Llanasa and Llandyrnog.

The best of Elizabethan glass has been removed from Cheshire to Stoneleigh Abbey, Warwick. It was a curious array of the Saxon and Norman Earls of Chester from Brereton Hall. A few coats of arms of 1577 date remain at Brereton Hall, and there is a damaged coat of arms and inscription of 1601 at Prestbury.

The 17th century is well represented in a small window at Farndon, executed after the Restoration in enamels from drawings done by Abram Bosse about 1635 and is a kind of War memorial window to the Royalist, Sir Francis Gamul and his Cheshire companions.

Heraldic glass of this century is to be found in the north chancel window at Broughton in Staffordshire where other early 16th century glass representing kneeling donors, removed from Wybunbury in Cheshire, is housed, with other glass in a south chancel window. The best and almost only surviving specimen of 18th century glazing is at St. Peter's, Congleton, in the top of the east window, but a complete window by Eginton remains at Llandegla across the border in North Wales (removed from St. Asaph Cathedral) and at St. Alkmunds, Shrewsbury, is another interesting window dated 1795 by Eginton, based on Guido Reni's Assumption.

David Evans is represented at Davenham, near Northwich, with four figures of Evangelists removed from the east window and now placed in the west windows of the aisles.

Of later 19th century glass, Heaton, Butler and Bayne are represented at St. Peters, Chester, and in the south aisle of Chester Cathedral, Wailes in the east window of the Lady Chapel of the Cathedral and south Transept of Nantwich, and the work of Warrington in the two obituary windows to Cholmondeley and Egerton at Malpas about 1846.

There are Burne Jones windows at Parkgate, Boughton and Macclesfield. Kempe is well illustrated at Eastham in Wirral and at Bunbury, (south chancel) whilst the best Bryans window is in the north aisle of Tarvin. The window is a memorial to his parents, his father having been the Vicar of Tarvin for many years.

Cheshire is not without glass painters at the present day. Several are at work and the results of their labours are to be seen in quite a number of churches in the county. The Cheshire historian must judge for himself whether or not he likes them.

A SHORT GLOSSARY.

ABRASION. The process whereby the red film on flashed glass is ground away to reveal the clear glass (see FLASHED).

CAWMES. Sometimes Calmes. Grooved lead strips having an H. cross section, with which glass is pieced together to form a leaded window.

CRUCIBLE. The pot of hard earthenware in which molten glass was prepared and melted.

DIAPER. Ornamentation applied as an all over pattern on a surface.

FLASHED GLASS. Clear glass having a thin coating of red glass on one side to ensure transparency.

GROZING. The process whereby the edge of a piece of glass is nibbled into a required shape by means of a grozing iron.

GROZING IRON. A piece of metal having a small notch with which glass is shaped, by a process called 'grozing.'

LIGHT. A single aperture of a window.

MATT. A thin wash laid upon glass by means of a brush.

POT METAL. Glass which has received its colour in the pot or crucible, and is therefore coloured throughout. The term is used to distinguish it from flashed glass (qv).

QUARRY. A lozenge shaped piece of glass.

SADDLE BARS. Sometimes called sondlets. The internal horizontal iron bars of a window. Vertical bars are called standards or stanchions. Both gave strength to the window to resist wind pressure.

Books suggested for further reading.

"ENGLISH MEDIAEVAL PAINTED GLASS." Le Couteur. S.P.C.K.

"STAINED GLASS IN SOMERSET." Christopher Woodforde. Oxford.

"THE NORWICH SCHOOL OF GLASS PAINTING IN THE 15TH CENTURY." Christopher Woodforde. Oxford.

"A GUIDE TO THE COLLECTIONS OF STAINED GLASS." Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Bernard Rackham.

"THE ANCIENT GLASS OF CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL." Bernard Rackham.

"ANCIENT PAINTED GLASS IN ENGLAND." Nelson.

"MEDIAEVAL CHRISTIAN IMAGERY." G. McN. Rushforth. Oxford.

"THE PAINTED GLASS OF YORK." F. Harrison. S.P.C.K.

"CHESHIRE GLASS: AND INTRODUCTION." Chester Arch. Society., Jnl. vol. xxxvii, pt. i. Maurice H. Ridgeway.

"COLOURED WINDOW GLASS IN CHESHIRE. 14TH CENTURY." Lancs. and Cheshire Antiq. Soc. Jnl. vol. lix. Maurice H. Ridgway.

"COLOURED WINDOW GLASS IN CHESHIRE. 1400-1550. Lancs. and Cheshire Antiq. Soc. Jnl. vol. Ix. Maurice H. Ridgway.