

## STAINED GLASS IN SCOTLAND: A PERSPECTIVE

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This introductory sketch to a large subject endeavours to outline some of the trends, styles and influences at work in stained glass in Scotland from its revival around 1820 to the present time.

In the massive chronological survey of stained glass published in 1976, Lawrence Lee describes glass as an enigmatic natural substance formed by melting certain materials and cooling them in a certain way.<sup>1</sup> The use of the adjective 'enigmatic' is both interesting and apposite and serves as an introduction to this article. There is sometimes present in stained glass, because of its relationship with light, an elusive, inexplicable element that defies description – a mysterious factor that is indeed *enigmatic*. This is not totally surprising considering the different strands that combine to form stained glass – colour, form, symbolism, craftsmanship; all contained within a living relationship with light. And it is light that gives life to stained glass. Light and life and mystery.

Glass has an ancient history, as Pliny's account in *Historia Naturalis* illustrates. There is evidence that coloured glass existed in Egypt, and in the Mediterranean world.<sup>2</sup> Within the Roman Empire, glass makers practised and developed their art and the glazing of window spaces became a custom. Thus, when the Christian Church became established upon a European scale, the basis for the making of stained glass was already established.

Stained glass, however, is principally a Christian art form, and, as such, its origins go back to the sixth century, when Saint Gregory had the windows of Saint Martin of Tours glazed with coloured glass. Benedict Biscop, Abbot of Monkwearmouth, near Durham, employed Gallic glaziers in his monastery church, and, in Germany, early stained glass was found at Kloster Lorsch, Wissembourg and Augsburg, where the five prophet windows in Augsburg Cathedral are tall, startling Byzantine figures.

But it was with the rise of Gothic architecture in the twelfth century that the expansion and development of stained glass truly began. The time was ripe. Villages and towns were growing and there was a consequent increase in church

building. Romanesque architecture with its rounded arches and squat pillars was yielding place to Gothic, a more vertical, graceful style, whose soaring vaults and pointed arches supported a different type of fenestration. Gothic windows were also vertical, graceful structures whose elongated lancets and intricate tracery patterns with their varieties of foliation and pierced work provided splendid frames for stained glass. The seminal figure here is Suger, Abbot of St Denis, near Paris, in the twelfth century and powerful minister of Louis VII.<sup>3</sup> Suger raised a magnificent Gothic cathedral which, as the first great Gothic edifice, became the inspiring prototype for subsequent cathedral architecture, and a series of great cathedrals followed throughout the Ile de France. Suger had stained glass installed in his cathedral, and soon medieval stained glass developed into an often brilliant and dazzling array.

Medieval glass was both *speculum mundi* and *bibulum pauperum* – mirror of the world and bible of the poor. As the former, it reflected its age and contained real life pictures sometimes full of raw vitality and emotion before the veneer of a later sophistication dulled the scene. There was a varied spectrum of subject matter: the natural world; the bible; sacred and profane; saints and their emblems; heraldry; spirits of good and evil; the family tree of Christ. This was a credulous and literal age. A crafty, cunning look on the face of a medieval tradesman, the horrors of hell with its flames and torment, the splendours of heaven, and the tiny, lovable details of everyday life represented by a spider and its web, a songbird, a leaf – all these are found crowded into medieval stained glass. And the bible of the poor, also, for it was from the prophet figures, saints, parables, and life of Christ that illiterate worshippers were taught their bible lessons – by looking and observing.

There was something glorious about medieval glass and its complex iconography (the language, meaning and interpretation of symbols); its Jesse Trees (where a literal branch grows from the abdomen of Jesse and ascends through the lineage of David, flowering finally in Christ); and its schemas, as at Fairford, in the Cotswolds, where a complete sequence begins with creation and progresses through prophecy, nativity, gospel, to last judgement. The colour scheme was that of the bright primaries, and these also had their own significance, blue, for example, denoting heaven, spiritual love, truth; and red, the colour of passion, blood and fire. Yellow was an emblem of the sun and suggested divinity, and green, a fusion of two primary colours, was

a symbol of regeneration and hope.<sup>4</sup>

As the medium of stained glass expanded, centres of early excellence were established – at Chartres, for example, where the purity of river sand was an asset, and at Norwich, York and Flanders. There is sadly no extant medieval glass in Scotland due to Reformation violence\*. Nevile Davidson, late minister of Glasgow Cathedral, writes in an earlier Cathedral Guide of only a few fragments being found,<sup>5</sup> and other fragments exist at Edinburgh's Magdalene Chapel and in the museum of St Andrews. Medieval stained glass, like all other art forms, experienced its own cycle of birth, vitality, zenith and decline. The contemporary stained glass artist, Crear McCartney, writing about the windows of St Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, gives a fascinating account of Scottish glass of that early time:

But Scotland was a poor country, and figurative stained glass was a luxury. Most of the great cathedrals, even those in Northern France, were never completely glazed, with the exception of Chartres. In Scotland's cathedrals, it is more than likely that the glazing would have been with plain or grisaille glass, with a few lights – perhaps beside a shrine, glazed with figurative windows. Certainly St Machar's would never have been a Chartres of the North. The Golden Age of stained glass was from about 1170-1250... and later, glass painting degenerated, so that by 1470 there were screens of light glass, yellow with silver stain, and over-ornamented with elaborate canopies, beneath which figures struck awkward medieval postures whilst casting bewildered side-ways glances at the Renaissance...<sup>6</sup>

The Reformation violence destroyed almost completely the aesthetic legacy of centuries. David Stevenson gives a picture of this in an Occasional Paper written for the friends of St Machar's Cathedral:

\*Editor's Note: It seems to me that more destruction is commonly attributed 'Reformation violence' than is altogether warranted. It is not the sole cause of the absence of medieval glass in Scotland. The Burgh Records of Aberdeen make it plain that juvenile vandalism and decay caused by 'storm of weather' and 'long track of time' were contributory causes. Moreover, it is plain from a minute of 1623 that armorial glass, at least, continued in place. It stipulated that public funds would cover only repairs in plain glass but that heirs and friends of those commemorated might replace arms and inscriptions at their own cost.

In December 1559 a force recruited in Angus and the Mearns was sent north by the Lords of the congregation to impose reformation on a reluctant Aberdeen. After violently 'reforming' Aberdeen itself, the reformers marched on to old Aberdeen, and found the cathedral undefended. The precise nature of the destruction that followed is impossible to calculate, but undoubtedly there was a great smashing of windows and woodwork, tearing down of images, altars and hangings, defacing of paintings; and the cathedral library was destroyed.<sup>7</sup>

Scenes like this one in Aberdeen were common throughout Scotland and a new and aesthetically bleak period was to follow. The First Book of Discipline devoted its third chapter to the Abolition of Idolatry, and thereafter Reformation worship followed a plain and unadorned path set out by the hand of Presbyterianism Triumphant, whose services followed the fixed liturgy of the *missa sicca*, or dry mass. This was a sombre time of long sermons regulated by a swivelling hour-glass; omnipotent clergy in hodden grey; precentors at their desks below the pulpit working within the narrow musical confines of the twelve common tunes; kirk sessions who had power to discipline the congregation and place them on cutty stools or in the joughs or jaggs (and who took vicarious pleasure from listening to the accounts of those who had dared anticipate the delights of marriage – 'the lynx eyes of the elders appointed both to watch and to pray' is Henry Grey Graham's later graphic description).<sup>8</sup> Stained glass had no place whatever within this very different didactic schema the extent of whose aestheticism was confined to the high, commanding pulpits with their stencilling and carving; some fine Scottish silverware and pewter for baptisms and communions, and many ornate and elegant Laird's Lofts to house the nobility and gentry during the long services.<sup>9</sup>

The eighteenth century was the Age of Enlightenment, whose emphasis was on philosophy and reason, and whose Georgian churches with their round-headed windows and heavy sashes were of an elegance not suitable for stained glass. It was a long winter until the time of the singing of birds was heard again and stained glass emerged in the bright colours of the Gothic Revival, which began early in the nineteenth century and soon gathered impetus.

This was a rapid, pulsating time of excitement and revolution. The Romantic

Era – the addition of strangeness to beauty, to quote Walter Pater's definition.<sup>10</sup> Strong influences were at work, often interacting with each other. In Germany, the Nazarenes (or Lukasbrüder, as they were also called) were a powerful influence in art, where painters such as Overbeck and Pforr, turned to the early works of Raphael for inspiration. This, in turn, influenced writers like Schlegel and Tieck, composers of the stature of Schubert, theologians like Niemeyer. Moritz von Schwind was an artist closely associated with the Nazarene Movement and it was he who was responsible for the vast mid-nineteenth century scheme of Munich glass in Glasgow Cathedral, with its vivid colours and dramatic figures which sadly soon faded (and this scheme ended in something approaching obloquy).<sup>11</sup> Von Schwind collaborated with the Scottish artist William Dyce, and soon the melodramatic, bright Munich glass was to be found adorning some of Scotland's churches.

But this Gothic Revival was not the re-emergence of medieval Gothic, which had been organic and functional, evolving from the liturgy and requirements of the Roman Church. This was different. This was stylistic revival, beginning with the refurbishment of Walpole's English mansion at Strawberryhill.<sup>12</sup> Strawberryhill Gothic became a catchphrase. So did Heritors' Gothic, as this landowning class who were then responsible for church fabric often employed nineteenth century architects adept at this revivalist style – architects like William Burn, Richard Crichton, Gillespie Graham, Archibald Elliot, William Stirling, David Hamilton, John Baird, David Bryce.<sup>13</sup> Soon Gothic revival churches sprang up all over Scotland, like William Stirling's perpendicular church at Lecropt, near Bridge of Allan, or Richard Crichton's church at Kincardine-in-Menteith, or Archibald Elliot's romantic essay at lonely Dalmally, in Argyll, or William Burn's imposing church of Saint John, in Edinburgh's Princes Street. Or in East Lothian, the Gothic church at Stenton again by William Burn; the vernacular Gothic of Oldhamstocks; and most appealingly, the early Gothic revival church of the Fletchers at Saltoun – a true child of its time.

And these Gothic Revival churches were the first to receive back again stained glass. William Raphael Eginton of Birmingham was one of the first glass stainers whose work appeared in Scotland during this early period. Glass stainer to King George IV, he was much patronised by the Scottish nobility.<sup>14</sup> His window of 1823 in Taymouth Castle, Perthshire, shows the Lords of

Breadalbane amidst a wealth of heraldic detail, itself containing miniature work of a high order; for example, in the tiny flowerets and plant stalks most delicately picked out in soft shades of colour. His series of windows showing the heads of Saints in Edinburgh's Episcopal Church of Saint John is one that reveals a harder palette, and being installed in 1816, must be amongst the earliest nineteenth century stained glass in Scotland.<sup>15</sup>

Scottish stained glass pioneers in Glasgow were the firms of William Cairney, Hugh Bogle and the Keir family, this latter firm being an important firm in Glasgow's stained glass revival, work from their studio going out to churches in Central Scotland also, and sometimes beyond, as their Good Samaritan window at Dalmally Church illustrates with its bold figure drawing and strong contrasting colours. David Keir was master glazier to Glasgow Cathedral in 1859, and his sons William and John joined him and eventually continued the expanding work of this studio.<sup>16</sup>

But the firm responsible for properly establishing the stained glass revival in Scotland was Edinburgh's Ballantine and Allen. James Ballantine had worked with the Scottish artist David Roberts, whose Holy Land scenes became famous and assisted his election as a future Royal Academician. In 1845, Ballantine had published his *Treatise on Painted Glass* setting out his own views, and many fine artists trained in his studio in Carrubers Close, off Edinburgh's High Street. His son and grandson carried on the tradition and this became the dominant firm in Edinburgh, the Lothians, and the South-East of Scotland.

These early windows were sometimes stilted and forced, with lifeless tableaux locked into the leadlines, and based upon earlier fifteenth century models. It was David Keir's apprentice, Daniel Cottier, who introduced a different style with his figure drawing influenced by the sculpture work of Ancient Egypt and Greece, and his overwhelming and often startling church interior colour schemes, notably those of Townhead, Dowanhill and Queens Park churches in Glasgow. His association with the architect Alexander 'Greek' Thomson was a fruitful one, and Cottier later moved to London and became involved in the Aesthetic Movement.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, as the nineteenth century progressed, so did stained glass, and

experienced several sea changes as it came under the influence of different movements and styles; Pre-Raphaelitism with its romanticism, seriousness, morality and sensuousness; the Aesthetic Movement which was, in reality, a continuation of Pre-Raphaelitism with its suggestive, evocative style; the reforming influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement with its emphasis on vernacular skills and cottage industries; the undulating, asymmetrical Art Nouveau, with its flowing, curving, swirling lines,<sup>18</sup> and in the midst of these influences there was also work that continued to be influenced by earlier styles whilst adapting to some of the new changes. The Glasgow School of artists produced work of outstanding quality, and this School rejected the revivalist approach which was controlled by religion and architecture, and was basically artistic in its approach, not dictated to by religion and interested in glass per se.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, a progressive and vibrant series of artists worked in the later part of the nineteenth century. Stephen Adam, who had trained with James Ballantine, and who in turn trained the brilliant Alfred Webster. John Stewart, David Gauld, Oscar Paterson, Harrington Mann, George Walton, Norman MacDougall, Anning Bell, all were part of an often brilliant galaxy making use of new, empirical techniques such as acid etching and polychromatic colour schemes. William Morris and Burne-Jones, as chief exponents of the Pre-Raphaelite artists, contributed some beautiful designs for Scottish windows, as did Louis Davis, the Arts and Crafts artist who often worked in Dunblane Cathedral and the rural South Ayrshire parish of Colmonell.<sup>20</sup> Christopher Whall was another outstanding Arts and Crafts artist working in Scotland for a time, and the windows he executed for Clark Memorial Church in Largs are of high, imaginative quality.

Thus, the century closed in a blaze of stained glass splendour, raising for a time Scottish glass high in the European artistic scene. The Edwardian hedonism that followed was short-lived, and ran swiftly towards the horrors of the First World War; fin de siècle indeed, and a grim carnage that was to change all things, for new and baleful influences were present. The whole artistic climate changed as creative forces struggled to come to terms with what had happened. Reactions were different. The composer, Vaughan Williams, for example, served as a trench soldier, and some years later his feelings were released in his Third Symphony – called *The Pastoral*. In this most English

of works with its undulating, gentle themes, the paradox is perceived in the bi-tonal opening, and in the slow movement, with its haunting natural trumpet calls. The battlefields are revisited, but in sorrow and sadness, not in anger. The war poetry of Sassoon, Owen, Binyon and Rosenberg is well known, but perhaps the lesser-known Ewart Alan Mackintosh expresses the inexpressible, in his *Ghosts of War*:

This is our Earth baptized  
With the red wine of War  
Horror and courage hand in hand  
Shall brood upon the stricken land  
In silence evermore.<sup>21</sup>

The stricken land describes well the aftermath of that war. Countless memorials were raised to honour the Fallen, including many stained glass windows. And a study of some of these reveals the difficulties artists had in their task. Vague, amorphous souls spiralling upwards across a spider-web of lead lines, is one description of Douglas Strachan's war memorial window in St Machar's Cathedral.<sup>22</sup> The exhausted khaki-clad soldiers in Alex Walker's window in St Leonard's Church in St Andrews is more convincing. The bombed cities and wastelands on the margins of J.T. Stewart's window in Queen's Park High Church is realism finely drawn. The towering figure of Michael standing guard over a hideously slain dragon at New Kilpatrick Church, Bearsden, shows Douglas Strachan in triumphant mood after the Second World War.<sup>23</sup> But sometimes there are faces on windows that have no expression at all. Not cleansed or purified, as some clergy of that time claimed in their rodomontade, but faces that had travelled beyond time and feeling, as on James Ballantine's window in Saint Andrew's Blackadder.<sup>24</sup> And that tells its own tale.

Beneath the brilliant parable window in the south transept of Glasgow Lansdowne Church – a window that shows Christ riding upon a donkey, not into Jerusalem, but into Glasgow, there is a small metal plaque. It tells briefly and simply that this was the last window made by Alfred Webster, who, upon its completion in August 1915, left at once for the trenches of Flanders – where he was killed two months later. Webster at his best was a Mozart of Stained Glass, and his work had a virtuoso quality all of its own

that marked it out as unique. The chancel window of Lecropt Church, near Bridge of Allan, for example, shows this clearly in its involved and intricate iconography and its beautiful colour schemes.<sup>25</sup> His Lansdowne window was an apotheosis of its time, and brought to a cruel end a rare talent and a whole era of Scottish stained glass work.

There was a change of direction after 1918. The decline of historicist influences was one such change. Expressionism, mannerism, complex symbolism and different colour palettes combined to form a new spectrum to which new and gifted artists began to contribute. The approach in some instances was generally more eclectic. Some artists became major figures: Douglas Strachan, William Wilson, and Gordon Webster (son of Alfred Webster), forming a formidable trio whose work was to be found all over Scotland. James Ballantine III, Herbert Hendrie (Head of Stained Glass at Edinburgh College of Art), and C.E. Stewart formed another diverse trio whose work was different one from the other. In mid-century, Sax Shaw (a student of Hendrie's), John Blyth (who studied with Wilson), Douglas Hamilton, Carrick Whalen, Douglas McLundie (of the Abbey Studio), all were producing some fine work in the midst of some that was also rather indifferent. Sadie McLellan, Mary Isobel Wood, Isobel Goudie and Margaret Chilton formed a quartet of gifted artists whose work is also found throughout Scotland.

In the latter part of the twentieth century and to date, artists such as Roland Mitton (a superb colourist whose work has some unusual hallmarks all of its own, like humour and innocence), John Clark (now working in Germany after his tour de force with his complete schema for Queen's Park Synagogue), Susan Laidler, Emma Shipton, Lesley MacPhee, Alexander Parker, Erika Shovelin and Yvonne Smith,<sup>26</sup> are all part of the different but continuing line of contemporary stained glass artists.

1 Lee, Lawrence (et al.), *Stained Glass*, Michael Beazley, London 1976, p.8

2 *ibid.*, pp.10 and 11

3 William Anderson, *The Rise of Gothic*, Hutchison, London 1985, pp.21-31

4 For information concerning Christian iconography Diane Apostolos-Cappadona's *Dictionary of Christian Art* is recommended. The Lutterworth Press, 1994

5 Davidson, Rev Nevile, *The Cathedral Church of St Mungo (A Short History and Guide)*, Glasgow, Bell & Bain, 1960, p.23

6 McCartney, Crear, *The Stained Glass Windows of St Machar's Cathedral* (Occasional Paper 5), Aberdeen: Waverley Press, 1979, p.1

- 7 Stevenson, David, *St Machar's Cathedral and The Reformation* (Occasional Paper 7), Aberdeen: Waverley Press, 1981, p.2
- 8 Graham, Henry Grey, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*, A&C Black, London, 1899, p.321
- 9 Hay, George, *The Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1957. (Part 2: Features & Fittings)
- 10 Grout, Donald Jay, *A History of Western Music*, New York, USA: W.W. Norton & Co., 1960, p.493
- 11 McCartney, Crear, *The Stained Glass Windows of St Machar's Cathedral*, p.3
- 12 Summerson, John, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830*, Penguin Books, 1953, pp.403-406
- 13 For further information concerning these architects, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects (1600-1840)* by Howard Colvin is recommended. John Murray & Co., London, 1978
- 14 In a letter from Martin Ellis, Department of Applied Art, City of Birmingham Art Gallery
- 15 Gifford, John, McWilliam Colin, Walker, David, Edinburgh. The Buildings of Scotland series, London, Butler & Tanner Ltd., p.278
- 16 Donnelly, Michael, *Glasgow Stained Glass*, Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, 1981, p.5ff. The Pioneers
- 17 *ibid*, p.8ff
- 18 These themes are well treated by Elizabeth Morris in her book: *Stained and Decorative Glass*, The Apple Press, Baldock, 1988
- 19 This aspect has been stressed by the stained glass historians Sally Rush and Linda Cannon, both graduates of Glasgow School of Art, in unpublished Occasional Papers
- 20 Savage, Peter, *Lorimer and the Edinburgh Craft Designers*, Paul Harrison Publishing, Edinburgh, 1980, p.20
- 21 In *Flanders Fields* (Scottish Poetry and Prose of The First World War), Edinburgh, Mainstream Publishing, 1990
- 22 McCartney, Crear, *The Stained Glass Windows of St Machar's Cathedral*, p.5
- 23 From notes and observations by the writer. (Also McCardel, James, *New Kilpatrick Parish and Its Story*. Bell and Bain, Glasgow. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn. 1973)
- 24 *ibid*.
- 25 *ibid*.
- 26 Scottish Glass Exhibition catalogue, Glasgow Museum and Art Galleries, 1989

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