

THE SWISS ENAMEL GLASS WINDOWS
IN PATRIBOURNE CHURCH

The oldest and best glass in the church consists of eighteen panels of Swiss enamel glass paintings which were presented to the church by the first Marchioness Conyngham in 1837.

Lady Conyngham probably acquired these paintings when making what was called "The Grand Tour" which consisted of visiting the cultural centres of Europe and it was the thing to do in fashionable society at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

There used to be a guide to Patribourne Church written in 1930 by the Rev. Knight, Vicar at that time and he gives a brief description of the windows and says they are Flemish glass paintings. Later on, however, a full and detailed description was published in 1933 by Mr. N.E. Toke in *Archaeologia Cantiana*. There are several excellent half-tone illustrations in the text and it is on Mr. Toke's treatise that these notes are based.

The glass is not Flemish but Swiss the artists mostly coming from Basel, Zurich and Lucerne in north-west Switzerland and many of the coats of arms and badges depicted are those of Swiss families living at the time the windows were painted which was between 1530 and 1670. They are of a mixed character; some are of Biblical origin and some, purely secular and they are fine specimens of the glass painter's art and have stood up to the ravages of time in a remarkable manner. There are eighteen panels in all: ten of them in the lancet windows at the East end of the chancel and eight are in the South window of the Bifrons Chapel. These last are exposed to full sunlight for most of the day and yet they are in very good condition, for strong sunlight, on account of the ultra violet ray content, is liable to break down the colours, yet these panels are in excellent shape and there seems to have been little deterioration in the hundred and more years that they have been in position.

A great number of these glass enamel paintings were produced in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and they commemorated alliances between families; gifts between towns, guilds and corporations, birthday and christening presents and so on. Although most of them originated in Switzerland, they were by no means confined to this country, but were common all over the Continent and many found their way to England. The amount of detail in some of the panels in the church is extraordinary and the visitor who wishes to make a careful study would be well advised to use a pair of good binoculars when examining them.

This enamel glass is not the stained glass we are accustomed to in churches. Stained glass consists of a mosaic of pieces of glass coloured right through, each of which has been cut out of a sheet of "pot metal" (i.e. glass fused and coloured in a crucible). This mosaic of glass is then painted to give indispensable details, such as faces, drapery and so on, the whole being held together by strips of lead. Then it is mounted in an iron frame or armature and forms the church windows with which we are familiar.

In enamel glass the subject is painted on to a sheet of plain white glass with a vitreous pigment consisting of finely powdered glass mixed with an oxide or other chemical to give the colour and the painting is then fused into the glass sheet in a kiln or furnace.

At the time that these panels were made, the glass painter's craft was very much of a do-it-yourself business. The artist had to grind and make up his own colours, build his furnaces and, in fact, do the whole lot from scratch, except that he might get some of his raw materials and chemicals from the local alchemist. These people, though often charlatans, knew a great deal more chemistry than we credit them, for in the intervals of knocking up love philtres or a choice slow poison for one's rival, they carried out much practical and valuable research and would doubtless do quite a good trade in the metallic oxides and other chemicals required by the artists: gold and copper for the reds, cobalt for the blues and silver for the yellow stain.

In order to help him with his work on the windows, Mr. Toke got into touch with a Professor Lehmann who at that time (probably in the late 1920's) was head of the Swiss National Museum at Zürich where there is a very fine collection of Swiss enamel glass. The whole of the consultation seems to have been carried out by voluminous correspondence; Toke does not appear to have visited Zürich, nor did Lehmann come to Patricxbourne! Toke, who was an expert photographer, produced photographs of the panels and sent them to the Professor, who gave his opinion when he saw the prints, which would have been in black and white only, for the colour transparency as we know it now, had not yet arrived.

What a pity that the two did not meet here when we would have had a much more authoritative account of these beautiful paintings. However, they managed quite well!

THE PANELS

Taking the windows in the chancel first, we will begin with the North Lancet, the one on the left when facing the Altar.

1. At the Top. The Garden of Gethsemane.

This panel is in beautiful and rich colours. Christ is shown in a purple robe, praying. An angel appears before Him from the clouds bearing a cross and a cup.

Below are three Apostles asleep: the one on the right with a sword is St. Peter, St. John is in the middle and St. James is on the left.

There is an inscription in German which, translated, reads:

"The worthy city of Lucerne"

which presumably was where the artist lived.

The lower part of the panel is filled with heraldic shields, one of which bears the double-headed eagle, the insignia of the Holy Roman Empire.

The painting is unsigned and undated. The borders of white roses and purple squares are pot metal and simply fill in the window space; they are not part of the painting.

2. North Lancet - The Crucifixion.

Mary, the Mother of Our Lord, stands at the right of the cross and St. John is on the left. The woman at the foot of the cross is Mary Magdalene. Also at the top of the panel there is an inscription in German asking for prayers of intercession and forgiveness and for life eternal in the world to come.

Then there are two figures, one on each side and they are the patron saints of the donors, St. Michael trampling on the Devil, a dragon, and St. Anne with the Infant Christ. The little girl is supposed to represent the Virgin Mary. This curious idea was not uncommon in German art of this period, and is probably due to a desire to emphasise the Virginity of Our Lady.

Below are the two donors who commissioned the artist. Their names are Michael Bysler and Anna Walcher. He is in black and wears a sword and she is in a long, sweeping black dress, evidently the fashion at that time, for this dress appears again in other panels in the church.

The artist is Peter Bock of Altdorf and the date, 1589. This is the only painting in the chancel windows which is signed by the artist.

These artists in glass painting took in pupils and apprentices and formed "schools" in much the same way as did the Old Masters such as Rubens and Canaletto. The unsigned panels may have been by a pupil who might have got into trouble if he had signed a copy of one of his master's paintings.

3. North Lancet: Bottom panel. Samson holding the Jawbone of an Ass.

This panel shows Samson slaying the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass and he is having fun!

Various bits and pieces of Philistines are under his feet and others are seen in flight in the background.

Here the artist has made use of pot metal for Samson's pale pink coat and also for the blue sky, otherwise the picture is of enamel glass. It is somewhat crowded for there are several fragments making up the whole.

Above Samson's head there is a tiny picture of a figure kneeling in front of a fountain. This is an allusion to the story in the Bible in which we read that Samson became very thirsty after his efforts and he prayed to God and water spurted out of the jawbone so that Samson "when he had drunk, his spirit came again and he revived..."

Above this is a head in the sky which possibly represents the Deity.

The date is 1538 and is the oldest of the panels in the church. There is no signature.

Central Lancet

Top. Knight in Armour and below, an angel together with a bugle and other devices forming a crest or coat of arms.

The figure in armour is in characteristic attitude, feet astride and hand on hip defying all-comers, and appears several times in these panels.

In some cases the knights carry standards and were probably military leaders in Switzerland of considerable influence and importance.

The name of this one, according to Toke, who no doubt had it from Professor Lehmann, is Jacob Witte, but apart from this, there is no other information about Herr Witte.

The date is 1579 and there is no artist's signature.

2. Roman Soldier

He is a splendid figure in fine, rich armour and strongly resembling that wrought for the Emperor Charles V and wears the crimson cloak of a Roman general and he carries a shield on which is the word "Victoria". Toke notes that this is a fragment of a larger painting representing an allegory of war which is not altogether suitable for a central window immediately behind the Altar cross! It should change places with the crucifixion panel next to it in the North lancet. However this would mean disturbing the panels which are not of the same size and re-making the window, so it might be best to leave it where it is.

The panel is unsigned and there is no date.

3. The Adoration of the Magi

The artist was evidently given a great deal to get into a small space and the result is somewhat crowded and confused.

At the top are two small pictures; the one on the left shows the Annunciation and the one on the right, the Adoration of the Magi.

On each side and standing in front of pillars are, on the left an angel and on the right, the Virgin Mary holding a cup and a palm branch.

There is a long inscription in German to the effect that when Christ was born in Bethlehem, three chosen kings brought Him offerings.

The names of the donors are at the foot of the panel and the date is 1589. The painting is attributed to Peter Bock of Altdorf who was responsible for The Crucifixion panel in the North Lancet.

4. Saint John and Saint Elisabeth

Again, as with the painting above this one, there are two small insets at the top of the panel. Top left shows The Crucifixion with the implements and symbols of the Passion - the hammer and nails and so on, and on the right is another little picture of the Annunciation.

The two central figures represent St. John on the left and St. Elisabeth of Hungary on the right. She holds a loaf and a pitcher of water.

St. John bears a chalice from which a snake issues. There is a legend that an attempt was made to poison the Saint but the poison rose up in the form of a serpent when he began to drink from the cup.

There is no date or signature to the painting, but according to Professor Lehmann, it is a fine example of the work of Martin Moser, the best glass painter in Lucerne in the sixteenth century.

The pictures in the central lancet are surrounded by a striped and blue border of pot metal glass to provide a setting for the Swiss panels, but it does not make a good background as it is confusing and greatly detracts from the beauty of the pictures.

South Lancet

1. Top. A bearded knight in armour and below and to the top appear three bearded monks or priests. It is curious to note that all have forked beards. Above is an angel with a cross and a small medallion of the Virgin Mary.

As to what it is all about is guesswork. The date is 1602 and the picture is unsigned.

2. Another Gethsemane painting.

This is larger and more detailed than the panel in the North lancet and it is somewhat overcrowded.

In the foreground the disciples are asleep, St. Peter grasping a sword. Christ is in a blue robe and an angel appears to Him holding a chalice and a cross. There are two small inset pictures at the top left and right hand corners respectively. That on the left, according to the inscription shows the High Priest offering bread and wine to Abraham, while on the right is a line of priests kneeling before an altar.

In front of pillars on each side are, left - St. Peter with his key, and right - St. Paul with the sword.

Two donors, un-named, kneel one on each side. The man is dressed in armour and the woman's flowing black gown is exactly the same as that of the lady in the North Lancet panel, except that her sleeves are yellow.

3. Samson slaying a lion.

This is almost an exact reproduction of an original woodcut by Albrecht Dürer. Note the bright yellow lion contrasting strongly with the beautiful blue sky in pot metal. The castle represents one near Nurnburg, Dürer's home.

Now we go to the South window in the Bifrons chapel. There are eight panels in two vertical rows of four each. Beginning with the painting at the top of the left hand window nearest the Chancel arch and reckoning from top to bottom.

BIFRONS CHAPEL

1. The Crucifixion

This is a very good example of the clever use of silver nitrate stain in the use of which the Swiss artists were unsurpassed. They could vary the colour from the palest lemon yellow through chrome and orange to a deep brown that was almost black.

There is a great deal of family history here and the artist has tried to please his client by putting in the lot,

coats of arms, patron saints and all. The family concerned is that of Im Ebnet, who flourished in Northern Switzerland during the sixteenth century. The donor is Balthasar Im Ebnet and he is represented at the top left hand corner of the panel by a little picture of Balthasar, one of the Three Wise Men. On the right is St. Anne, who holds the Infant Christ and is accompanied by a little girl again representing the Virgin Mary. Middle left is St. Elisabeth of Hungary and middle right is St. Dorothea. Balthasar Im Ebnet married three times and these three saints are the patron saints of his wives. He and his wife (presumably the last one, in the usual sweeping black dress) kneel at each side.

The artist is Peter Bock of Altdorf and the date is 1589.

There is an inscription which, when translated, is very similar in meaning to that in the Gethsemane panel in the South Lancet (No. 2) signifying the bringing of the Symbols of Communion by the High Priest.

In the actual painting of the crucifixion it is curious to note that the man wielding the hammer is left handed.

2. St. John Baptist preaching by the River Jordan.

The High Priest and other Jewish notables are approaching him. This is a beautiful little painting in brown oxide fired into plain glass and is so delicately executed that it almost resembles an etching.

The Donors' names are given as Johann Schwander and Maria Zeunnerginn. The artist is Hans Caspar Gallati, who was responsible for three other similar-sized panels in this window. He painted it in 1670.

3. Pyramus and Thisby.

At first sight this hardly seems a proper subject for a church window and it would be interesting to know if it appears in any other church in this country. However, the mediaeval interpretation of the story, which was told long ago by the Latin poet, Ovid, in his "Metamorphoses" was that it was the classic example of fidelity of love and as such was often illustrated by artists in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. We only know it in Shakespeare's glorious burlesque of "The Most Lamentable Comedy of Pyramus and Thisby" in "A Midsummer Night's Dream".

Pyramus lies "on the dank and dirty ground" clad in his best suit while Thisby, wearing a golden crown and dressed in billowing white garments bends over him, her hands raised in horror at the dreadful and afflicting sight! Thisby's white palfrey stands waiting for her while in the distance, Lion accompanied by a cub, look on with some curiosity. In the middle distance, a bottle floats under a bridge and it can only be assumed that this bottle had contained "Dutch courage" for Pyramus.

The whole painting, which is richly coloured and full of detail is one of the earliest of the panels and is the work of Hans Funk and is dated 1539.

4. Left Window. The Adoration of the Shepherds.

Another beautifully drawn painting in brown oxide by Hans Gallati, who has contributed three panels to this window. The same arrangement of blue pillars will be seen in the opposite panel at the bottom of the adjacent window. The date is 1670.

The inscription refers to the Donors, John Caspar, treasurer of the district of March and to his spouse, Anna Barbara Hegnorin. The lower part of the picture is taken up by coats of arms and other heraldry.

5. Right-hand Window. Top. Standard Bearer.

Here is another of these swashbuckling knights with his standard. This is Peter Giesler of Altdorf and Toke gives a detailed account of Peter's history. He was the equivalent of a Lord Lieutenant of an English County and added to his fame by making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, hence a little picture of Jerusalem at the top of the painting together with a little vignette in blue of the Virgin and Child surmounted by the Paschal Lamb.

The whole picture is a mass of detail: horses, towns, and lions all mixed up with heraldic emblems.

Browns and yellows predominate and the painting is another very good example of the skilful application and use of silver stain.

The artist was Peter Bock of Altdorf, who was at work between 1573 and 1608.

6. Right-hand Window.

Another brown oxide painting by Hans Gallati of Wyl. The subject is uncertain, but Our Lord and His disciples appear to be meeting a party of women, so it might well be Mary and Martha welcoming Jesus to their home. The cross in the foreground is an anachronism.

The names of the donors are inscribed as Peter Guntlin and Maria Zeiglerin, his spouse. The date is 1670 and is the latest of the panels.

7. Right-hand Window. Standard Bearer.

Another sturdy Swiss knight reminding one of the trade mark of "Swiss Knight" processed cheese. The manufacturers of this product have their headquarters at Thun in German Switzerland and the firm may have had a similar window in mind when choosing their distinctive mark.

According to Toke, this man is the standard bearer of the Val Leventina in the Canton of Tessin and judging by his rich gold and silver armour, he was a man of some importance. The steep road in the background showing a man driving mules is supposed to represent the St. Gotthard Pass.

This panel is the work of Brandolf Roter of Lucerne and the date is 1550.

8. Right-hand Window. Murder of St. Meinrad.

St. Meinrad was a Benedictine monk who lived about 800 A.D. and spent his life shunning his fellow creatures and wanting to be alone. The rumour got around that he had a store of money hidden away, so two robbers killed him, but found nothing.

This panel, which is similar in decoration to the one alongside it (The Adoration of the Shepherds), is another beautifully executed painting in brown oxide by Hans Gallati and the date - 1670.

The town in the background is Rapperswyl on Lake Zürich near where St. Meinrad had his hermitage. Note the enormous size of the club, grasped by the robber, who was evidently taking no chances.

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