

Training: the modern role of the Worshipful Company of Glaziers, and the British Society of Master Glass Painters

There is a renewed emphasis today on the importance of vocational training right across the craft disciplines. This has been fuelled by concerns that the skills which underpin the Crafts, and the Heritage and Conservation sector may be under threat due to the decline of the apprenticeship system.

Initiatives have been made to identify the scale of the problem, and the needs within the sector by a number of organizations including English Heritage, and ICON (The Institute for Conservation). The BSMGP (British Society of Master Glass Painters) has been actively involved as the recognised professional body for Stained Glass.

The provision of training in stained glass was the focus of a recent meeting convened by the chair of the BSMGP conservation committee, and held at Glaziers Hall with the participation of representatives of the Glaziers Trust (the charitable foundation of the Glaziers Company directly concerned with education within the craft.)

These two bodies are central in our efforts to improve the training provision for young stained glass professionals.

The conclusions of the meeting were optimistic on several levels:

- The dearth of formal training in conservation at the academic level, which is in stark contrast to the position of our colleagues in Europe, was given a great boost by the news from Sarah Brown that an MA course in glass conservation is proposed by the University of York.
- With the involvement of the BSMGP, the NVQ route for training (NVQ level 3 Glass Processing.) has been successfully piloted by Helen Chick of Holy Well Glass, Wells. It is hoped to extend this with several new applicants this year. Several Colleges, geographically widespread to cover applicants from various parts of the country have signalled their willingness to supervise stained glass applicants for the qualification.
- As a real support for applicants, in the near future the BSMGP website will give information on this qualification, including funding issues (such as the emergence of Proskills as a one stop reference point for available funding.) As an important additional support, there will also be straightforward guidelines on the site for those undertaking the qualification.
- The Glaziers Company, through the Glaziers Trust, now offers a range of grants for trainees in the craft. These range from the 40 week workshop placement under the 'Award for Excellence' programme, a series of 10 week workshop placements under the 'Ashton Hill Award' and newly introduced 1 week 'Professional Development Awards' which allow those already working in the craft to develop a particular area of skill by visiting other workshops or professionals. Under this last scheme, which was recently introduced, several young professionals have extended their skills

this year in diverse areas including glass painting and conservation science. GQA (The Glass Qualifications Authority) have kindly agreed to financially assist placements under this scheme for later this year.

- The Company also organizes the annual Stevens Competition, an opportunity for design students to produce designs to a brief, which usually ends in the commission being realized.
- There is the real possibility that stained glass trainees will benefit from the successful ICON Heritage Lottery Fund application, which will fund internships for trainees in the conservation field.

Thus the flurry of initiatives in training we have witnessed over recent years seems to be producing real benefit for trainees. It is hoped that this will give stained glass professionals at the beginning of their careers the opportunity to work towards recognised qualifications, acquiring a high level of craft skills along the way.

There is also the opportunity to move towards higher academic attainment through the proposed MA course at York University, and by attaining the highest level of professional accreditation, through the ICON ACR (Accredited Conservator Restorer) route.

Although we can not be complacent, and refinements and improvements will need to be made, there is no doubt that this is an improving situation.

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