



This year's conference was based at the University of Lincoln, where the staff made us welcome, and the bus started outside the residential blocks – very handy. The pre-Conference blurb told us that this time the focus was to be on medieval glass, which worried me a little, as medieval glass is still terra incognita to me. As it turned out, there was plenty for everybody.

On Thursday night, there were introductory lectures from Rev. Gordon Plumb and Dr Jim Cheshire, Senior Lecturer at the University of Lincoln, two of the Wise Men (or Persons) who were our Guides for the Conference. Gordon gave us a survey of Lincolnshire glass (with interesting non-glass asides from his years as a vicar) and Jim introduced the Cathedral's glass.

We spent most of Friday (and could have spent all of it, in fact) in and around the Cathedral with Tom Küpper and other members of the Cathedral workshops. The biggest highlight of the visit (in more ways than one) was the Dean's Eye, a great rose window at the apex of the north-west transept gable. The recent restoration and replacement of the 'Eye' had been harder than one would expect, because it was an early rose window (1220–1235), whose builders had used its tracery as part of the structure of the gable! As a result, what should have been a simple (simple?) glass conservation job had turned into a major rebuild. Most of us climbed up to the giddy ledge just below the 'Eye'. When there, it was obvious (as it was not from the floor of the Cathedral, miles below) that the tracery was covered with modern technology to monitor it, and that the glass was almost (almost) lost within it.

The second highlight was a tour of the Cathedral workshops, including the masons' section (the Cathedral is unique in this country in that it owns its own quarry, a mile or so from the Cathedral). We also saw – of course – the glass workshop.



Top: Welcome talk at Lincoln Cathedral; above: the Cathedral workshops; right: Penny preaching to the converted

After lunch, some people went for a floor-level tour of the Cathedral, but I chose the other option – a tour of the roof-space. This included the ringing chamber, where a notice warned visitors to be careful because 'bells upset'. I wonder what the matter was? After the Cathedral, we walked to St Anne's Bede Houses, a development designed by Pugin with a chapel designed by Butterfield, containing a window by Comper. This was followed by a walk back to the University via the Arboretum, St Hugh's RC church and St Mary le Wigford.

After dinner, another of our Wise Persons, Penny Hebgin-Barnes, who catalogued the medieval glass of Lincolnshire for the CVMA, talked about the medieval glass we were to see. (Penny guided all the medieval glass visits.)

On Saturday, we were on the coaches. The first stop was Tattershall church, to see a display of 15th-century glass, collected into the east window. Then a long, cross-country drive to St Nicholas' church, Great Coates (a suburb of Grimsby), where we



half-gatecrashed the preliminaries for a wedding. Here was a young man waiting to meet his destiny, in the person of Hayley June (I looked at the order of service), and then two coachloads of nutters came tumbling in, babbling about windows, of all things. The two windows we had come to see were by our member Geoffrey Robinson, who was with us. This was the first time he had seen them since they were installed in the 60s – he seemed to think that they were bearing up very well.

A shorter trip then took us to Redbourne, a nice country place, where we were booked into the pub for lunch – how splendid. But ... the pub staff weren't expecting us. They ran round and kept sallying forth with random plates of sandwiches and bowls of chips. (They eventually admitted it was their fault, and knocked a big wedge off the bill.) The delays meant that people were able to drift across in groups to the other reason for our visit: the redundant church of St Andrew. This had painted glass, which drew comments ranging from 'Oh, it's only painted glass – I'm not bothering,' to 'Ooh, painted glass – just what I'm looking for.' The main (east) window had what Pevsner describes as 'a horrific scene of the Opening of the Sixth Seal', copied from a painting of the 1820s by Francis Danby.

After visiting Holy Trinity, Messingham, where the medieval glass had to compete with bell-ringing practice, we went on to Morton (outskirts of Gainsborough). Here, the opulently appointed church of St Paul had been rebuilt in 1891, with windows by Morris & Co (i.e. Burne Jones designs).

The final call of the day was at Hackthorn, an estate church (still the home of the Cracrofts and their descendants, who rebuilt the church in its present form in the 1840s). The main windows dated from the 1840s to the 1860s: two vigorous early Waileases and an early Henry Holiday, when he was designing for Powell's of Whitefriars. At the back of the church – an extra treat (for me, anyway) – was a splendid, small, two-light, mainly heraldic window by the late John Hayward.

Saturday's final official fixture was the Conference dinner, sedate or boisterous, depending on which table you sat at. As well as the usual speeches (giving well-deserved thanks), Madam Chairman used the occasion to present scrolls to newly elected Fellows and Associates, a nice touch which I think people appreciated.

On Sunday, our first stop was at St Denys's church, Silk Willoughby, to view the east window of 1897 by Christopher Whall, identical to the one we saw at Berry Pomeroy (Devon) on the Exeter conference. We also saw the Jubilee window (2002) by our member, Glenn Carter.

Our main destination for the day was Stamford, switched from Saturday to avoid traffic to/from Burghley Horse Trials. The main purpose of the visit was to see medieval glass, and we started in Browne's Hospital, a set of well-appointed almshouses dating from the late 15th century. There was glass here not just in the chapel, but in other rooms as well (probably made in Stamford or Peterborough, about 1500). It was less damaged than in the average church, and much of it was in its original places and contexts, probably because the hospital was not a church or monastery, and so less likely to meet with the fury of the Reformers (and Henry VIII's hatchet men).

There was more late 15th-century glass at St Martin's church, a lot of it having been removed (stolen or rescued?) from Tattershall church in the 18th century. This included a thoughtful Samson carrying the gates of Gaza. Some of us (confession) didn't make it to St Martin's, but slipped into St Mary's, instead, to look at two early Christopher Whall windows (1890s) and – for good measure – an Edward Payne window (1976).

After finding our own lunches at Stamford, we went on to look at 14th-century glass in St Michael's church, Heydour (between Grantham and Sleaford). The two remaining fairly complete (though restored) windows were donated by members of the great medieval family, the Scropes. One window was of three deacon saints (Vincent, Lawrence and Stephen). The other was a 'martial' window, with St George flanked by two king-saints in full armour: Edward the Confessor and Edmund of East Anglia. Edward – very out of character, one would have thought – looked as though he was wearing bikini bottoms over his armour, a bit like Superman. (There was also a side-chapel, demoted to a broom cupboard behind the organ, but stuffed with 18th-century monuments by Rysbrack & Scheemakers.)

The main fixture of the afternoon was St Wulfram's, the main parish church of Grantham. This is a magnificent medieval church, with magnificent medieval window openings, filled with some magnificent Victorian and 20th-century glass. Of particular note were the three Waileases, filling the row of three west windows; a dramatic Harry Harvey window (1962); a good Leonard Evetts window (1970) and two splendid windows by John Hayward (1970 and 1974). If you haven't been, do go.

On the way back into Lincoln we called at Holy Cross church in the suburb of Boultham. Here, there was a striking new east window by Glenn Carter (2004) (photo top right). A huge, seemingly abstract, swirl of lead and graded shades and colours of glass was based on the image of a swan rising, swans being of local significance (for instance, Lincoln's saint, Hugh, famous for his pet swan).

On the final evening (after quite a few people had gone home) we had a good 'Members' Slides' session, which was obviously enjoyed by all present. Ann Sotheran was defeated by uncooperative technology, despite Helen Robinson struggling personfully to right things with her laptop. (Computers are wonderful things, but only when they work.) The other four gave



splendid performances, providing a rare insight (rare for a non-practitioner, anyway) into practitioners' inspirations, and the way they respond to challenges.

Hilary Davies had had to design windows for a developer who was converting a chapel into a house. She had also had some success making ship models out of 'found' materials leaded together (bits of stone ... metal ... a pair of callipers). Christine Boyce told us about a trip to the Loire, and an artist who might have influenced her mentor, Leonard Evetts. Refia Sacks then showed us the inspirations behind her dreamy, mysterious panel for the 30 cm2 exhibition – experiments with feathers and leaves. Helen Robinson had turned her hand to a variety of things. With one commission, she had had a spot of bother with silver stain, as a result of which a Dove of the Holy Spirit had come out of the kiln as a canary.

The evening ended on a technical note, with everyone none the less very interested. Gordon Plumb showed us two shots each of 10 different windows, and asked us to guess which shot was film, and which digital. Everyone identified the better-looking shot as being the digital one, and in eight cases they were right. This led on to a discussion about photography, in which it became clear that not only the future was digital, but also (more or less) the present as well, even though there are still unsolved problems about long-term preservation, and the obsolescence of equipment, recording media and file-formats.

Most of the above is about glass, but conferences are also about people, and networking. As soon as everyone met, dozens of conversations (and verbal sparring matches) re-started where they had left off last year. Ladies sat next to their regular companions for a good natter. One feature of the Annual Conference is having typical glass-talk all around you ('A good badger can stand on its own bristles', 'How much does your website cost?' and 'Where's the bar?').

If I could venture a minor criticism, it's that we try to pack in too many visits – as it was, we had to miss out some of the scheduled stops. But I really don't want to carp. Organizing the conference is an enormous labour of phoning, synchronizing arrangements, finding coach-firms and checking the week before (and even then, the pub at Redbourne still managed to forget us). Sue (Ashworth) does an enormous amount of nerve-racking work, which can be thankless, so Sue: Thank You.

On a minor personal note, I managed not to be late for the bus too often. Also, I noticed from a commemorative wall-plaque that we passed, near the Cathedral, that Lincoln was the early home of George Boole, the inventor of Boolean algebra. I'm sure you didn't want to know that.

Roger Fern