

BRIEFING THE ARTIST

*commissioning a
new stained glass window*



An information leaflet from the
Committee on Church Art and Architecture
of the Church of Scotland
August 2003, revised June 2006 & August 2008



For many people, money spent on stained glass windows or other artefacts is wasted, an indulgence when a church is having difficulty in meeting running costs. Sensitive choices *do* have to be made, but we cannot ignore the observable fact that, in a Church so leery of art works as ours has been in the past, there is today an increasing number of commissions.



This pamphlet is based on the Report of the Committee to the Church of Scotland's General Assembly of 2002. Cover: 'Now thank we all our God', window in Cardross Manse by Christian Shaw, former stained glass adviser to the Committee.

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Comments and suggestions for inclusion in any revision of this pamphlet are welcomed.

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BRIEFING THE ARTIST

1. The importance of good design

In our information leaflet *Church Windows*, we discuss the matter of design in the following way.

a) In beginning a design, a stained glass artist will have in mind the architecture of the building and the other windows already in place, since all the features of a building must add up.

b) A good design will have something new about it. This does not necessarily mean that it must be abstract, but it will contain the unexpected, even when traditional themes are used. This means that the attention will be caught, and mind and imagination stimulated. A weak or derivative design will simply, in turn, weary those who live with the window - a missed opportunity, or worse.

c) A good design wears well - so that both we ourselves and future generations find something fresh and refreshing in it rather than cease to notice it because it has too soon reached its sell by date. It should not be the kind of 'unexpected' that will only be a seven day wonder and then become a spent force, nor should it slavishly follow styles of yesteryear, resulting in a window which may be pleasant to look at but does not arrest us and make us think, pray or wonder.

The reason that good design matters so much is that the finished window has so much to do. The preface to a book about the glass in York Minster speaks of its windows as

being 'to greet, instruct and inspire the medieval pilgrim'.¹ Windows still have this function. To people as they enter, they may be the friendly face of an austere building, the medium of a dialogue between visitor/worshipper and God, enabled by the artist. Of course, a window may as much send people out as welcome them in. In one aspect, as people look towards pulpit and table, a window may invite tranquility, but the window they face while leaving the church may be designed to uplift and encourage. As far as instruction is concerned, as they image events in the biblical narrative, or the history of Church and nation, windows can remind and teach of the foundation of the faith.

They also inspire, in that the creativity of the artist, drawing on his/her imagination to explore the subject matter, can draw an answering creativity in the spectator in such a way that the beauty in the subject and in the person can mediate the beauty that is God. What Angela Ashwin claims for the words and music of worship is true also for stained glass: 'When we reach out to God corporately in the poetry and music of liturgy and hymn, our desire for God meets his desire for us. The channels are open for him to reclaim and remake us, not only individually but also as the Body of Christ, the place of his indwelling'.²

For many people, money spent on stained glass windows or other artifacts is wasted, an indulgence when a church is having difficulty in meeting running costs. Sensitive choices *do* have to be made, but we cannot ignore the observable fact that, in a Church so leery of art works as ours has been in the past, there are today an increasing

¹ Sarah Brown, *Stained Glass at York Minster* (Scala, 1999); preface by the Dean of York.

² Angela Ashwin, "Spirituality and Corporate Worship", in *Worship* Vol.75, No.2, p.126.

number of commissions. This would have delighted Millar Patrick, the first Convener of the Artistic Matters Committee (now called the Committee on Church Art and Architecture) who in the 1930s spoke of the 'divining rod of the imagination', which he rated as much an essential instrument of thought as reason itself. 'If you are to teach the truth of Scripture you must maintain a constant play of the imagination over the symbolic language it uses'.³ Window, mural, mosaic, the colours and designs of pulpit falls or table frontals, tapestry, organ case, carving, the light holders above pulpit or table, these and other artefacts can be part of the hearing of the gospel and offer to lodge it more securely in the mind.

A recent Art and Christian Enquiry leaflet suggests that such works of art have an influence even if we are not aware of it:

*Worship calls out all our sensibilities. We expect words and music to engage us. We are worked upon, often unconsciously, by architecture. Painting and sculpture each in their different ways also have the power to draw us deep into the understanding and the believing which belong to worship. The church building has therefore been a vital and critical setting for works of art created specially for it.*⁴

2. Before commissioning a window

It is often when commissioning new works that the most protracted conversations take place between congregations and the Committee on Church Art and Architecture, and where there is most potential for misunderstanding. Of no

³ Millar Patrick, "Pulpit and Communion Table", *Church Service Society Annual*, 1932-33, p.8.

⁴ *New Art for Church Buildings* (London: Church House Publishing), short pamphlet.

medium is this more true than stained glass windows. Like music, visual art communicates on many levels depending on the recipient. A tune or a representation in glass may fill our own soul, but when commissioning a new window (as in producing a new hymn book) we have to plan not only for posterity but for those also whose ear or eye - or whose life of the spirit - is more experienced or more developed than our own. In many cases, too, matters have advanced too far before the Committee has become involved. Even a decision locally to install a new window can be a 'decision too far'. Considerations at this early stage include:

Function. Why do we wish to put in a window? Is it to help people focus during a time of worship? Is it to declare the faith, or teach about the Bible, to those who visit the church during the week? Is it to commemorate someone's notable Christian witness (see 6.3 below)? Is it to celebrate an event? Is it to remind worshippers of the scope of their task of Christian witness and service in the world? Is it simply practical - to soften the light in a problematic window, for example? The answer to this question about function helps subsequent planning to get off on the right foot.

Clear glass. In some buildings clear glass has been part of the original architect's inspiration and to disturb this with stained glass will noticeably change the quality of the building. Although the intention may be to create what is felt to be a more suitably 'religious' environment, this can often blur the religious statements already being made by the building - about light, about clarity, about the fact that our worship takes place within, and not apart from, the natural or the human world framed through clear windows.

Decorated glass. Some buildings have matching windows which while not pictorial are attractively patterned and coloured and give a unity to the building. To many worshippers these may seem unremarkable and 'not saying anything' in the way that pictorial windows do. Familiarity has caused people not to see them for what they are, and it is therefore hardly surprising that they wish to replace them with 'real' stained glass windows. In so doing, they may be losing part of the original beauty of the building.

Light source. The addition of pictorial windows over a period may have darkened the interior of the church unacceptably. Even though it may seem that precedent has given permission to continue the practice, in that some stained glass windows have already been installed, the point may have come at which further windows may lower the light level too far, especially when it may mean starting to fill in a part of the building which is as yet untouched by stained glass. On the other hand, there may be very positive reasons for placing a window in a particular place. It could be that in inserting such a window a forgotten corner of the church can be 're-instated', connecting that part with the church as a whole.

Before even an artist is approached, therefore, a decision has to be made about whether a new window is appropriate at all. The Committee becomes involved at this early stage, coming to a common mind with the congregation before proceeding and giving approval in principle to the project.

MAKING THE COLOURS SING **The story of stained glass in Scotland**

Scotland's record of stained glass is a fine one, as is demonstrated in Michael Donnelly's *Scotland's Stained Glass*.⁵ It is true, as he says, that the dramatic change of direction at the Reformation resulted in the loss of glass from the earliest period, although this was often an indirect result of changed practice or policies rather than of deliberate destruction. Lack of maintenance was often a culprit, and there was also the loss of the skills which the former monastic communities had nurtured. Of direct destruction there was undoubtedly some, even a fair amount, but this seemed far from being official policy. A letter issued in 1560 to the 'purifiers' of Dunkeld Cathedral warns them to 'tak guid heyd that neither the dasks, windocks, nor durris, be ony ways hurt or broken - either glassin wark or iron wark'.⁶

After several centuries of little activity in the making of stained glass, Scotland in the nineteenth century seemed intent on making up for lost time. With the growth of the middle classes and with increased prosperity, coupled with the upsurge in church building following the Disruption, a demand for stained glass in churches, public buildings and in the houses of the well-to-do began to grow, and there was no lack of glass companies and artists to satisfy this. The quality of work was high and the techniques innovative. Artists were receptive to and built on current Europe-wide movements in artistic sensibility. Teaching in the Schools of Art was encouraging and imaginative.

⁵ Michael Donnelly, *Scotland's Stained Glass* (The Stationery Office, 1997).

⁶ George Hay, *The Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches* (Oxford, 1957), p.13.

One of the earliest studios to produce successful designs, mid nineteenth century, was that of James Ballantine of Edinburgh (d.1877) who finally broke through Presbyterian reserve about pictorial glass with commissions in the present Sandyford Henderson building in Glasgow, Ibrox Parish Church, St. Giles' Cathedral and Dunfermline Abbey, among others. Worthy of particular mention are his firm's nine windows in Greyfriars' Kirk in Edinburgh, commemorating notable ministers of that church. One of the most distinctive of the earlier artists was Daniel Cottier (d.1891), known as much for his richly polychromatic decorative schemes for the interiors of churches as for his colourful geometric windows (such as those in Pilrig St. Paul's Church in Edinburgh; there are examples of his work also in St. Machar's Cathedral, Aberdeen, Paisley Abbey, Largs St. Columba's and St. Michael's Linlithgow, among others).

Cottier, who ultimately took his skills to Australia, was as notable for the apprentices he encouraged. These included Stephen Adam (d.1910), in whose work is seen the stylistic influence of Japanese art (e.g. Pollokshields; Clark Memorial, Largs; New Kilpatrick, Bearsden). The combination of the talents of draughtsman, designer, and glass stainer, all brought to a high technical level, took Alf Webster (d.1915, aged 31), one of Adams' assistants, into the 'category of genius'. In Lansdowne Church in Glasgow, his 'great north and south transept windows are among the crowning achievements of Scottish stained glass'.⁷

Oscar Paterson's (d.1934) innovative techniques, unusual colour schemes and the dominant role of leadlines contributed to the development of the 'Glasgow style' (an expression of the movement known as Art Deco); although

⁷ Donnelly, pp.41,43. See also his *Glasgow Stained Glass* (Glasgow Museums and Art Galleries, 1981).

arguably his best work was found in domestic settings and ocean-going liners, he produced windows for a large number of churches, including St. Magnus' Cathedral in Kirkwall and Crichton Memorial Chapel in Dumfries. On the east coast, Douglas Strachan (d.1950) produced powerful multi-themed windows in remarkable colour (many examples, including St. Andrews Holy Trinity, Kirkcaldy St. Brycedale, Hyndland in Glasgow). Distinctive also was William Wilson (d.1972) whose vigorous designs are widely to be found, significantly in the series of windows in Brechin Cathedral and in the only recently recorded series of fourteen windows at Craigiebuckler.

These eminent Scottish artists have their contemporary counterparts. Examples of Sadie McLellan's (b.1912) powerful and imaginative designs, some of which used the new technique of *dalles de verre*, can be seen in Alloa, Netherlee, Glasgow Cardonald, the Robin Chapel in Edinburgh and Glasgow Cathedral. Crear McCartney, who weaves into his designs not just colour but sound, deriving inspiration from the works of different composers ranging from Carver to Elgar, has windows in St. Michael's Linlithgow, Dornoch Cathedral and the Auld Kirk of Ayr, and many others.

There are several other artists who merit special mention, like Carrick Whallen and Sax Shaw, and a proper account can be found in Michael Donnelly's informative and readily available publications. The next generation includes such artists as John Clark, Douglas Hogg and Christian Shaw, with John Lawrie and Anita Pate working in engraved glass, while a younger generation continues the tradition of breaking new ground which has distinguished Scottish stained glass makers since James Ballantine (see the list at

the end of this publication). With our churches so full of striking and well made windows, it would seem important that when we add to this legacy today we should take similar trouble to provide works of art which will be similarly valued by those who follow us.

A current task

An important dimension of the appreciation of such work is conservation. When buildings close, care is taken that nothing of value is lost. The Committee, always asked by the Church's Law Department to visit to make an inventory of furnishings and features of a building which is to be disposed of, and to advise what should be preserved, recorded or removed, pays special attention to the windows. It has been party to the conservation of certain important windows and their re-instatement in other locations. It is not always easy to fit a redundant window into another building, although it is sometimes achievable, and the other option, of mounting the window in a screen or on a wall, backlit, has been selected. Currently, talks are taking place with a number of parties to make better arrangements to ensure that no significant window is destroyed as a result of a building becoming redundant or changing its use.

3. Creating a better brief

The importance of a full briefing and exchange of views with the artist, when he/she visits the church or at another time, cannot be overstated. The desired window is not a disembodied work of the sort that can be displayed in a gallery but is to be part of a particular building which houses a particular people and which stands as witness in a particular situation. This particularity will be conveyed to the artist, who requires this as part of the inspiration of the design. This is not always a straightforward task because of the difference in vocabulary between the world of the Church and world of the artist, with their very different 'raw materials' (doctrinal, ecclesial on the one hand; colour, texture and form on the other). Sometimes it is difficult to know where to begin! The Committee is willing to assist in this process. The following should be borne in mind.

Choosing an artist It is important to approach an artist with proven ability in designing and making windows for churches. The Committee has included in its *Church Windows* pamphlet a list of such artists, but it is one that is continually being added to as younger artists become established. The list is to assist congregations and not to limit choice; the Committee is willing to consider designs from any stained glass artist, studio or company. It is worth while travelling to churches to look at examples of work by, say, two or three chosen artists before approaching one. The alternative course of action, inviting a similar number of artists to submit designs (a fee is usually paid), can also be helpful to congregations but has the possible disadvantage in that the design does not issue from a developing dialogue between congregation and artist.

Who briefs? Rather than the donor(s), the congregation, through a representative group, should have the main role in the planning of the window. As users of the building, it is their prayers and praise it will enrich. The group briefing the artist should contain someone with theological awareness and a knowledge of worship from both the point of view of conducting and participation. This is not to suggest that the donors be bypassed. Their knowledge of the person commemorated, or of any information relating to the reason for the window being commissioned, is important. Even if they are not members of the congregation, their contribution should be made.

Choosing the theme The theme should be thoughtfully chosen. Given our immediate tradition, with the content of our worship rooted in Scripture, a biblical starting point is appropriate. Given the nature of our Scriptures, this is also a most varied and endlessly renewable resource, with rich content of imagery, sayings and stories. However, care should be taken not automatically to pick on the most popular images or stories, already the theme of many windows. The Bible needs to be 'interrogated' from the point of view of the congregation's own situation, or from the particular witness of the person being commemorated. It is a task which calls for both prayer and study.

The contemporary context Our understanding of Scripture, however, is that through its pages the living Word of God is proclaimed in our own time. Scripture has to be interpreted in terms of the life we know and the challenges we face. This leads to a consideration of the times we are in and the situation in which the particular congregation witnesses and serves. The setting of a church may be rural or urban, farming or fishing, industrial or technological. There may be particular features of the landscape or particular challenges in the life of the local

community. Both church and community will have their own history. The chosen scriptural theme may be reflected in the witness of the person commemorated.

From the specific to the general That being said, we do not offer the artist a list of specific items or images that we want included. The aim is a design which has a universality about it. Too literal a treatment will not achieve this. The finished window should not be 'about' a family or person or situation but speak through these of the God who is both within and beyond, and speak in such a way that those who look upon the window will be able to recognise that God as one who speaks to them also.

Leaving it to the artist We brief the artist not to establish a hard and fast content which now simply has to be realised. The designer will have his/her own sources of inspiration - mentors, music, the colours of the natural world. The aim is to establish a dialogue, which continues until the design proposal is completed and the final cartoon made.

4. Avoiding pitfalls

In such a sensitive process as commissioning a new work, given the several parties who have to achieve understanding - donor, congregation, artist, Committee - and the nature of the subject matter, it is no surprise to know that difficulties can arise which may threaten the successful completion of the project.

When approaching a local artist The intention might be to approach a local artist, perhaps a member of the congregation, whose talents are well known and valued. However, where the artist is not conversant with the craft of making windows, this can give rise to problems later. The artists to which we have referred above (2), if they did not make the glass to their own designs, knew the process

inside out. There is a fundamental difference between creating a well-composed painting and preparing a cartoon for construction as a stained glass window. However, the Committee affirms the importance of tapping into the imagination and creativity of persons and groups in or related to a particular congregation, and has been involved in encouraging and working with projects involving local schools or other groups, in murals, mosaics, and even in the creation of new windows. Of great importance is the necessary step between idea and execution. The design of a stained glass window needs to be made in close consultation with a skilled stained glass artist, who may indeed welcome starting points from local designers.

Glass companies Again, it is sometimes the case that a congregation has approached one of the several companies who produce decorative glass for both public and domestic situations, and who may advertise widely. However, often the designs provided by these companies may not be suitable for church windows. The Committee has begun to take a proactive approach and is in touch with such companies (both in glass and in other furnishings) to discuss with them designs acceptable in churches today.

Memorials Often it is assumed that the most appropriate way to commemorate someone is to commission a stained glass window. The Committee's pamphlet *Gifts and Memorials* reminds the Church that the best way to remember someone who has made an active contribution to a congregation's life and witness may be to make a gift which enables this contribution to be continued. In the case of a choir member, for example, the commissioning of a new piece of music, special to that congregation, would have particular point; in the case of someone whose talent was for friendship, the redesigning of the vestibule as a place of greater welcome might be undertaken.

5. An example

With so many fine windows in Scottish churches, it would be difficult to select one. One example furth of Scotland clearly shows how artist and those commissioning worked together on the design for the window. It is in the cloister of Worcester Cathedral, marking the millennium, and is in etched glass. The artist was Mark Cazalet.

The window gathers up many local references but also contains images which show the relevance of the faith to the opening of a new era. There can be found the translating of the Worcester Antiphoner, St. Wulfstan, William Langland's vision of Piers Plowman, Richard Baxter composing hymns in prison, the burning of the monastic books on the Green, Woodbine Willie and the troops, Elgar conducting the "Dream" at the Three Choirs Festival. There is a mediaeval pilgrim, but also a humorous portrayal of a modern counterpart - a tourist complete with camcorder, his hat on backwards. To earth this in the promise of the Gospel, there have been selected four healing incidents and four of Jesus' most famous sayings.

Scottish parishes are equally rich in history and varied in the missionary opportunity they offer. The commissioning of a new work of art is an excellent opportunity for some in the congregation to revisit its history and reappraise its contemporary task. The resulting work will thereby be all the more likely, rather than be mere decoration, to carry the church forward in its witness and contribute a new note to its worship.

LIST OF ARTISTS

Note: a full list of artists' commissions are available from the office. What follows is a selection only, in buildings readily accessible, and with a geographical spread. Approaches to artists should be made through the office of the Committee on Church Art and Architecture.

ARTIST	EXAMPLES OF WORK
Jennifer Jayne Bayliss Aberdeen	Aberdeen, Ferryhill Church, Piper Alpha Memorial; Tarland, Migvie Chapel; Aberdeen University, Aberdeen, St Machar's Cathedral; Aberdeen, Royal Aberdeen's Children's Hospital ; Elgin, The Oak's Hospice; MacDuff Church; Fraserburgh United Reformed Church.
Emma Butler-Cole Aiken Edinburgh	Culross Abbey; Airdrie, New Wellwynd; Leith Baptist Church; Edinburgh, Royal Hospital for Sick Children; Cleish Chapel.
Linda Cannon Glasgow	Glasgow, Netherlee; Gourock , St John's; Glasgow Green, People's Palace; Glasgow, House for an Art Lover; Bearsden, New Kilpatrick.
Cara New Glass (Alec Galloway) Skelmorlie	Several pieces in Dubai & United Arab Emirates and Glasgow, Ashton Lane, the West End Window.
John K Clark Glasgow	Paisley, Abbey; Motherwell, South; Rutherglen, Stonelaw; Glasgow Cathedral; Lockerbie; Paisley, Oakshaw Trinity; Glasgow, Queen's Park Synagogue; Gullane.
Vivienne Haig Melrose	Oxford, Oriel College Chapel, The Newman Window.

Douglas Hogg Gordon, Scottish Borders	Dunbar; Dundee, St. Andrew's ; Bo'ness, Old; Edinburgh, Craigmillar Park; Edinburgh, Dean; Edinburgh, Comely Bank; Duns.
Nicola Kantorowicz Sonning Common	Suffolk, Kessingland, St. Edmond's Church; Oxfordshire, Great Coxwell, St Giles's Church; Oxfordshire, Marsh Baldon, St Peter's Church; Sussex, Chichester, Boxgrove Priory, West Window.
Eilidh M. Keith Glasgow	Glasgow, King's Park; Bearsden, New Kilpatrick; Glasgow, Hyndland; Nairn, Old, Muir of Ord.
Lorraine Lamond Glasgow	Glasgow, St. Enoch's Hogganfield; Kilmacolm, Old; Dundee, St. Mary's; Glasgow, St Alphonsus'; Glasgow University, Dept. of Film, Television & Theatre; Arrochar Parish Church; Glasgow St Mungo's R.C. Church.
Lesley Macfie Beith	Bonhill; Elderslie Kirk; Glasgow, King's Park.
Rob McInnes Glasgow	Glasgow: Hyndland Kirkmuirhill, Lanarkshire Rutherglen: Old Perth: St Ninian's Cathedral House for an Art Lover, Glasgow Kilmacolm Old
Shona McInnes Halifax	Dunbar; Rothes; Aberdeen St. Nicholas' (Oil Industry Chapel); Scone Old; Kingswells; Banchory, West; Knockando; Stonehaven, Dunnottar.
Catriona R MacKinnon Glasgow	Aberdeen, Cult's West; Aberdeen, St. Mary's R. C. Cathedral; Mearns; Prestwick, South;

Dysart; Colmonell.

Roland Mitton
Forgandenny

Lecropt; Glasgow, Cardonald;
Falkirk, Grahamston; Whitburn, South;
Falkirk, St. Andrews West;
Strathaven, Rankin; Plean; Cowdenbeath
Trinity; Halkirk and Westerdale;
Ecclesmachan.

Rainbow Glass Studio
(Moirra Malcolm)
Prestwick

Paisley, Laigh Kirk; Keith, North; Cumnock,
Old; Ayr, St. Columba; Darvel; East Kilbride,
Westwood; East Kilbride, Mossneuk; Newton
Mearns; Campbeltown, Highland; Prestwick,
St. Nicholas; Irvine, Girdle Toll.

Ronald Ryan Stained Glass
Edinburgh

The New Edinburgh Royal Infirmary,
Sanctuary; Maison Hectors Wine Bar.

Liz Rowley
Newport-on-Tay

Monifieth, St Bride's R.C. Church;
Dundee, St Andrew's; Dundee, St Boswell's;
Ballingry, St. Serf's; Dundee, Broughty Ferry,
Our Lady of Good Counsel; Dunfermline,
Queen Margaret Hospital, Chapel.

Christian Shaw
Edinburgh

Tranent; Connel; Keith, North;
Edinburgh, St.Giles' Cathedral;
Arran, Whiting Bay; Arran, Lamlash;
Inverkeithing, St Peter's; Mortlach; Stirling,
St. Columba's; Edinburgh, The Hub.

The Stained Glass Partnership
(Susan Bradbury & Paul Lucky)
Kilmarnock

Dreghorn, Old; Dailly; Bellshill, West;
Cambuslang, Trinity St Paul's; Symington;
Kilmarnock, Laigh Kirk; Dundee, Balgay;
Glasgow, Sherbrooke St Gilbert's;
Alloway; Stewarton, St Columba's;
Lossiemouth, Milngavie, St. Paul's.

ENGRAVED GLASS ARTISTS

John Lawrie
Edinburgh

Cardross;
Edinburgh, Canongate Kirk.

Anita Pate
East Linton

Hamilton, Old;
Kirkcaldy, Victoria Hospice;
Stafford District General Hospital, Pilgrims'
Chapel; Airdrie, New Wellwynd; Falkirk
Hospital, Chaplaincy Centre.

The Committee on Church Art and Architecture shares an office with the Office of Worship and Doctrine in the Church Offices in Edinburgh. It is staffed by the Rev Nigel Robb, Lynn Johnson, Anna Reid and Ms Anne White. Its address and telephone number are: The Church of Scotland, 121 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4YN, tel 0131 225 5722, fax 0131 220 3113. Faxes should be marked for the attention of the Committee. The e-mail address is: wordoc@cofscotland.org.uk.

Extra copies of this pamphlet may be obtained from the office, price 50p.