

# The Stained Glass Windows of Llanelly



There are four stained glass windows in this church, from two or three studios; two from Powell's of Fleet Street, London, and one from Celtic Studios of Swansea. The fourth window, the war memorial window, is from another supplier, as yet unclear.

The firm of *James Powell and Sons*, also known as *Whitefriars Glass*, were English glassmakers, leadlighters and stained glass window manufacturers. As *Whitefriars Glass*, the company existed from the 17th century, but became well known as a result of the 19th century Gothic Revival and the demand for stained glass windows.

In 1834 James Powell (1774–1840), a London wine merchant and entrepreneur, purchased the *Whitefriars' Glass Company*, a small glassworks off Fleet Street in London, believed to have been established in 1680. Powell and his sons were newcomers to glass making, but soon acquired the necessary expertise. They experimented and developed new techniques, devoting a large part of their production to the creating of church stained glass windows. The firm acquired a large number of patents for their new ideas and became world leaders in their field, business being boosted by the building of hundreds of new churches during the Victorian era. While Powells' manufactured stained glass windows, they also provided glass to other stained glass firms.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the firm formed a close association with leading architects and designers such as T G Jackson, Edward Burne-Jones, William De Morgan and James Doyle.

Celtic Studios was founded by two cousins from Morriston; Howard Martin and Hubert Thomas in 1933. Initially it was called *Martin and Thomas*, but was relaunched in 1948 as *Celtic Studios*. As a company, they endeavoured to follow the ethos of the *Art and Crafts Movement*

in using original designs, and avoid repetition. They were responsible for some 650 windows altogether, including about a third of them exported to Canada and USA. Many are in South Wales.

Howard Martin was invited in 1935 to run an evening class at what was then Swansea Art College and after the war the course developed into the Architectural Stained Glass Department and has prospered ever since, gaining a long-standing reputation as a centre of excellence in this subject, not only in the UK but also around the world.

The commissioning of the east window, of *Christ the Good Shepherd*, is recorded by Powell's and by the diocesan faculty applications of St. David's. It would appear to have been commissioned in 1909 (Pevsner's), and then installed in about 1910, being dedicated to George Reginald Attwood of Glaslyn Court. He was born in 1847, of Worcestershire gentry, and married Constance Marion *Brandreth* in 1887, and died in 1901. They had one child, a daughter called Rosamund Carless, born in 1888. His widow went on to remarry in 1907, Maj.-Gen. Sir Alexander Bruce Tulloch, KCB, CMG, who then died in 1920. Although commissioned into the Royal Scots, Tulloch went on to be commander of the Welsh Regiment in South Africa and Egypt. It may be this Scottish link that explains the thistles in the window. The crest in the bottom left hand corner is a swan rising from a crown, and is the crest of the Attwood family; the bottom right has a lion rampant, which is the other charge from the Attwood arms.



The figure of Christ bears comparison with pre-Raphaelite works such as *The Light of the World* by William Holman-Hunt. He is dressed in red and white as appropriate to the resurrected Christ, and carries a shepherd's crook. The face is a mixture of idealism and realism that eventually became sentimentality, but is distinctively an Edwardian representation of Christ in stained glass.



The inscription at the bottom is very much a product of the gothic revival consisting of both modernised uncial capitals and gothic textura miniscule.

The highly stylised, decorative approach to the foliage gives the rich tapestry effect, with many satisfying details of flowers and leaves, recalling high Gothic and early Renaissance art. Most of the foliage is generic and not significant in detail, but the thistle by the water may be a deliberate choice; theologically contradictory to the image of the Resurrection, it must be there for another reason. The delicately

lapping water however is altogether a new innovation, matching the well observed realism of the sheep. The landscape nods towards the local environs, anticipating the portrait of the church in the other Powell window to the north.

The sheep are less stylised than the rest of the motifs, and resemble sheep from such paintings as *The Pretty Baa Lambs* (Ford Madox-Brown), *Our English coasts/Strayed Sheep* and *The Hireling Shepherd* (both Holman Hunt). Sheep were an important motif in pre-Raphaelite art, combining as it did social, artistic and theological idealism.



The commissioning of the north window in Llanelly is not recorded but demonstrates many stylistic features of Powell's and of the time.

The memorial inscription, to Alice Roberts, d.1911, wife of Rev. George Roberts, incumbent from 1901-1913, thereby dates the window as after the greater east window.

The narrative of the window; *Mother Church receives Elli given by his Mother*, plainly draws upon the Tractarian theology of the institutional church as *mother of the saved* conflated with Mary the mother of Jesus, with the story of Elli described in the legend of St Cadoc, from which most of our knowledge of Elli of Llancarfan derives.

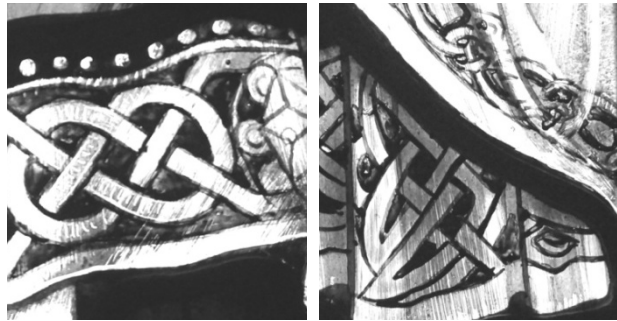
The face of the mother of Elli is clearly similar to Burne-Jones archetypes, comparison being made here with an oil study of Maria Zambuco for the face of Nimue, for the *Beguiling of Merlin* (1874);



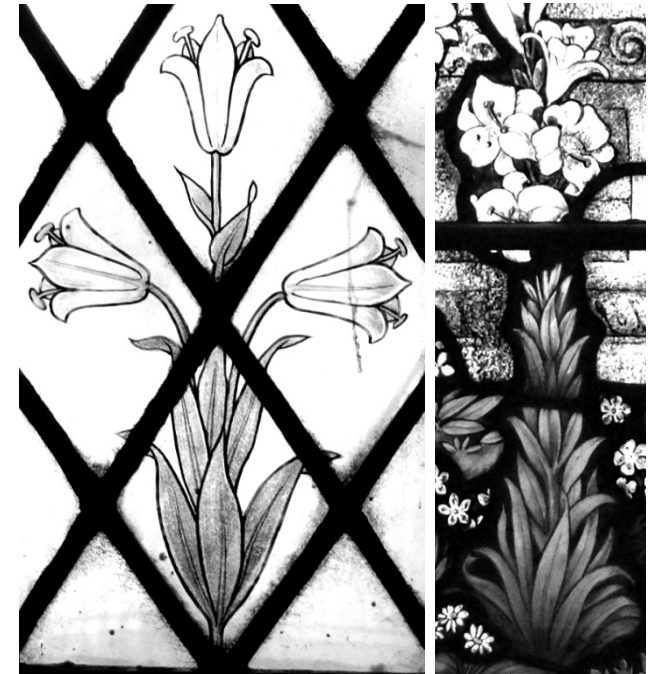
Note the strong, rather austere features with long powerful neck and well defined bones of the face, and full sensual lips. By comparison, the features of Mary are much more gentle and soft; more typical of the early renaissance ideals sought by the pre-Raphaelites.



The interests of the Arts and Crafts Movement included such genres as what became known as Celtic art, which eventually prompted the great study of insular art by George Bain. Details like the borders of the clothes of Elli and his royal mother show this with well informed and executed Celtic detailing. It is common now, but then was exotic, unusual and new.



The details of the flowers, such as the lilies and roses are deliberate motifs associated with Mary the mother of Jesus, and were stimulated by both the romantic interest in medievalism, and by the Tractarian movement in the church which cultivated such medieval ideologies.



Both the east and north windows are well executed and of good quality, but whereas the former is more costly and large, befitting an

aristocrat, the latter is more considered and thoughtful, consequently more unique in design and theology, rightly so for a cleric.

The war memorial window is also an unusual and thoughtful design. The drawing is more loose in style, less precise and less idealised, and tonally as well as topically, darker. Martin Crampin looked up the faculty in the Diocesan archives (then St Davids) in the National Library, but there is nothing on what appears to be the draft faculty to indicate who designed or made it. A single piece of correspondence alludes to a resolution to install a window being made at the vestry meeting of 21 April 1919, but the faculty is dated 22 June 1920. Vestry books or PCC minutes going back that far may find something relevant between these dates or a little after, and perhaps the name of the artist. We would be very interested to know. It has some similarities with artists associated with the Bromsgrove Guild, such as A.J. Davies and Sidney Meteyard, and the Glass House at Fulham, as well as artists in the circle of Christopher Whall.

The face of the Christ here too is generic, but although only 10 years later than the east window, it is a product of another world. It is more austere, more rugged, more forceful, and not the least, more modern in style. It does seem oddly small in proportion though; either by accident, or else by design in order to achieve a sense of perspective, of looking upwards with the soldiers; certainly the angle is from beneath.



Like the east window, it refers to the resurrection, but whereas the east window refers to the idyll of the new Earth and Heaven, this refers to the triumph of the Resurrection over Death. Christ is again in red and white, not luxurious satin but the pure linen and the robe dipped in blood of Revelation. He raises a banner over his head, and his cross, vehicle of his Victory over Death, is the backdrop. The soldiers rise up from death, in the Hope of Glory, the Glory of the Risen Victorious Christ; *Christus Victor*.

The faces of the soldiers are not generic; they are portraits, possibly of just one model, but they were drawn from life, not repeated from a pattern book, again a feature of the Arts and Crafts movement. The names below the memorial are real names of real people; it is appropriate for the real faces to reflect the real names recorded. Faith grapples with desolation, devastation and grief. The benign Edwardian optimism is over.



The plants in this window are mostly schematic and insignificant, save for the poppies growing by the feet of Christ, as he stands upon the tomb.



The newest decorated window is that by Celtic Studios, and dated by the memorial for Janie Gwynne Williams of Dan-y-Graig, who died in 1966. Correspondence from the time records changes in the design to reduce the cost; other decorative details were omitted for this reason. The final design, with decorative figures surrounded by plain glass are not uncommon in Celtic Studios' work, reflecting the lack of capital now available for such endowments as windows as well as a trend away from ostentation in design.



It presents a young Elli of Llancarfan. The figure is actually presented as a priest in the tonsure of a Catholic monk (not a British monk), without the mitre of an abbot. The staff is not that of bishop, but conceivably that of abbot, priest or itinerant preacher.

The bell to the left is symbolic of the ministry of preaching, and was a symbol of many early medieval saints of that time; it was rung when the saint reached an area in order to gather the congregation. To the right is a cross of a type often associated again with preaching crosses; a marked place to convene the local congregation before there were buildings. Overall Elli the founder is offered as an itinerant preacher.

At the top of the window are the arms of the new diocese of Swansea and Brecon, charged with the eagle of St John, its patron. Up till 1929 the church was in the old diocese of St David's; after that, it becomes the new Diocese of Swansea and Brecon, incorporating parts of the old dioceses of Llandaff, Bangor and St David's.



With thanks to Martin Crampin.

An interesting and unusual detail is that of the industrial works in the small side panels. They represent the ubiquitous coal mining and steel working of the area, but here that must refer in particular to the ancient steel and iron works of the Usk and Clydach valleys, to which the church owed its previous prosperity.



Photos/text; Rev. C. J. Bevan; November, 2013.