STAINED GLASS FROM GLASTONBURY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1989 the author catalogued the collection of glass from the Abbey site at Glastonbury and a year later presented a full report on it to the Abbey Trustees. The report remains in their custody at the Abbey Gatehouse. The oldest finds were of mid 12th century blue glass, and this, together with the late 13th century grisaille glass, deserves special attention here. The whole collection includes pieces of white and stained fragments dating between the 12th and 16th centuries, and also remnants of window cames, like much of the rest in poor condition. Nevertheless, techniques of glazing such as cutting, staining and painting were carefully noted. Wherever possible, archaeological evidence was used to link the various categories to specific sites within the Abbey.

BLUE GLASS

In his second Report on the excavations at the abbey in 1909 Frederick Bligh Bond described some of the glass he had excavated. The find-spots of these pieces are sites G and H on his plan of the Edgar Chapel. Bond's description made the blue glass readily recognisable:

> "A few small remains of encaustic tile and glass were gleaned from the mass – but nothing considerable. Some of the glass was of different nature to that which had previously been encountered, being much thicker, of a beautiful azure blue colour, figured with geometrical or scroll-like forms in a grey opaque line" (F. Bligh Bond, *Second Report on the discoveries made during the excavations, 1908–1909*, P.S.A.N.H.S. 1909 p109).

The grey lines Bond mentioned were caused by fire damage, but on every piece of painted blue glass some forms of decoration, made with black paint, are still visible. One common motif repeatedly appears, a paired leaf, elaborated at times into a whirling pattern. Other repetitive designs are further leaf-forms, as well as the architectural decoration of bead-and-reel. There is enough painted glass to suggest a date of *ca.* 1160.

These pieces have been catalogued according to ten types of design, which have been listed below. As well as these types, in this collection there are also many other pieces of blue glass, some of which belong to other periods and excavations. Whilst most pieces lack painted decoration, some have grozed edges, and others have been bent – probably through fire damage. None of these has been associated with Bond's excavation of 1908–1909. They have been catalogued as the following: GLSGA:1988/1339 G22; GLSGA: 1988/1340 G23; GLSGA: 1988/1341 G24; GLSGA: 1988/1226 G14; GLSGA: 1988/1392 G38.

Although it is true that Bond excavated these pieces just outside the Edgar Chapel he did not attempt to date them to the 16th century.

Poor and inexact archaeological records and lack of documentary accounts of the building make it very difficult to place this glass collection in a window or windows, or even any specific site or sites, but it is likely that it was intended for new windows for the Abbey in the mid-twelfth century. The large scale of its use, and adoption of decorative forms which mirror metalwork, sculpture and tile painting acknowledges the Parisian abbey of St Denis from the same period, as well as Saxon art-forms.

The patron responsible for the blue glass is almost certainly Abbot Henri of Blois, nephew of King Henry I, brother of King Stephen, Abbot of Glastonbury (1126–1171), Bishop of Winchester (1129–1171), and Papal Legate. As a patron of art and architecture he compares well with Abbot Adam Suger of St Denis, and Archbishop Roger Pont L'Eveque of York, Bishop Hugh de Puiset of Durham and Bishop Alexander the Magnificent at Lincoln. It is most likely that although the glass was made in France, the sheets were transported to England, where they were painted, fired and made into windows.

Unfortunately at Glastonbury itself there survive neither tiles nor capitals carved with interlacing foliage from the mid 12th century with which to compare the decoration of the glass, except one capital from the cloister. It shows strapwork decoration of a similar type to that found at Malmesbury and Keynsham abbeys, which originated from Burgundian Cluniac houses[1]. The use of the decoration illustrates shared sources of patronage, and taste of monasteries in this part of England. Furthermore, the interlacing foliage of the glass decoration is akin to that found on the porch of Malmesbury Abbey, which again suggests a common bond.

In support of this view the "V" shapes to be found on pieces of glass recall the compartments made out for portal sculptures at Malmesbury. Both also share the use of ornate vegetal motifs and offer a demonstration of popular monastic religious art forms in the West of England in the middle of the 12th century. Another clear source of inspiration for the decoration were the books that would have been in Glastonbury Abbey's library at this time. The leaf-type used in the glass painting is close to that employed in the Winchester Psalter, which itself was influenced by the Bury Bible, dating from 1137 onwards.

But in spite of sources belonging to English art, the idea of making ornate windows was inspired by such schemes devised for St Denis and Chartres, since they showed off the patron's and Abbey's or Cathedral's prestige. The painted decoration of the glass though is English, and used forms known to both patrons and artists in the West Country. That is not to say that there was a "workshop". The glass at Glastonbury is the only example of its kind to be found in Somerset, and it is entirely possible that the glaziers who made, designed, painted, leaded and fitted it did not operate in one place as a team. If more glass from the mid twelfth century were to be found in the West Country then more might be said later.

DESIGN TYPE A

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawings nos. 1:2

Two lines painted in black paint onto both sides of the blue glass are the borders for the main decoration of these pieces. This design is a paired leaf, bisected by an extending stem, which is made out in black paint. The leaf decoration is a vine, and appears turning one way and then another.

[1]C. Wilson, *Sources of the late twelfth century work at Worcester Cathedral in Medieval Art and Architecture at Worcester Cathedral*. The British Archaeological Assoc. Conference Transactions, 1975, pp. 80–90.

DESIGN TYPE B

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing nos. 3;4;5

Repeating the colour scheme, bordering and pattern of design type A but now the leaves of the vines have grown larger, with the curvature of the leaves given emphasis, causing a whirling effect throughout the decoration.

DESIGN TYPE C

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing nos. 6;7

Following the paired vine leaves of type A and elaboration of type B, these pieces introduce new aspects of design and painting. Here the glass has been shaped with the grozing irons to pointed arches. A "V" shape painted onto the glass emphasises these features. This bridges one part of the scroll work with another, giving it renewed direction and rhythm.

The painting of the leaves has increased elaboration. Now the bisecting stem of the leaves has grown a leaf of its own.

DESIGN TYPE D

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing no. 8

As with all the other types of glass, the painting uses a black background on blue glass, and has floral scroll work decoration, which in this case is akin to that of type C. Now the border design has only one line instead of two.

DESIGN TYPE E

Catalogue no. OLSGA: 1988/1399 G22
Drawing nos. 9;10;11

Once again the foliate scroll decoration has been developed to form the largest leaves seen. Now three lines act as borders for the pattern, which is made up of three curving leaves – one to the left, one to the right and a central leaf leaning to the right. These have all been given shadings and outlines, which complement and support the pattern's shape. In one case, the pattern has been made into a fleur de lys, but is akin to the other pieces in the group because of its shading and bordering and the shape of the pieces.

DESIGN TYPE F

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing no. 12

A broken piece of glass, without any grozed or nibbled edges, which has a series of interlocking octagons painted in black paint. The points of intersection are left as clear crosses, and are unpainted. Whereas all the other types of glass have been painted with variants of scroll foliage, this is the only example of geometric decoration in the collection. A

similar use of such patterns can be seen in the borders on the Winchester manuscripts, like the Henri de Blois Psalter which, like the glass, was made in the 1160's. In both architecture and sculpture similar forms can be seen, such as the doorway to the Bishop's Hall at Durham Castle, which also dates to the later 12th century.

DESIGN TYPE G

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing nos. 13;14;15;16

These four pieces of glass all have bead and reel decoration, with a bordering of two lines, like type A. One of the pieces, seen in drawing no. 16, shows a "V" shaped pattern, and has been grozed into a curved shape seen before in type C.

As in types B, C and D the painting of the pattern is very elaborate, and given outlines akin to the treatment of the foliate scroll-work. As in type F, this decoration is far better known in architectural work, and may have corresponded with the decoration of elements within the late 12th century's Abbeys buildings.

Bead and reel decoration was a popular forrn of masonry moulding, but has its place in classical architecture. It belongs to the astragals of the base and frieze of the entablature of the Corinthian order. Just as in that order, the bead and reel decoration combines with vegetal and foliate carving.

DESIGN TYPE H

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing nos. 17;18

Both pieces are broken, and have no grozed edges. Drawing no. 17 shows two pairs of lines, whilst no. 18 shows a prominent "V" shape, which is most likely to be drapery painting. The nested folds and soft lines resemble examples of mid 12th century drapery painted on glass seen in the choir of St Denis.

DESIGN TYPE I

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing no. 19

The appearance of forms which look like eyes at first suggest some kind of physiognomic representation, but it is unlikely that the artist was trying to paint a human face. What is more likely is that these three eyes belong to a painting of a wing of a seraphim, or Beast of the Apocalypse, such as may be seen in the seraphim in the Bury Bible.

DESIGN TYPE J

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1339 G22
Drawing no. 20

This piece evades any clear identification, and yet it is painted with some form of pattern or decoration. If it is a letter it is poorly painted, but it is likely that the glazing schemes would have contained writing.

GRISAILLE GLASS

The French word *grisaille* means grey or monochrome. In painting it often takes the form of a sketched design. Early designs of grisaille glass were developed by the Cistercian order during the early twelfth century, often comprising geometric patterns of clear and stained glasses without any painting.

The Cistercian order disapproved of excessively ornate art, and the fact that grisaille windows were cheaper to make no doubt helps to explain why this type became popular in monastic architecture. Costs were reduced by using white glass and monochromatic painting, and it was adopted extensively in the Cistercian houses in Burgundy during the late twelfth century, as well as in houses of the order in Yorkshire.

This type of grisaille glass retained its popularity during the thirteenth century, as can be seen in the Five Sisters window at York Minster between 1220 and 1250. Such a window allowed greater translucency. Again, Salisbury Cathedral was glazed with at least fifteen designs between 1220 and 1258. But whereas earlier English Cistercian grisaille had interlacing strap-work and cross-hatched backgrounds, the glass at Salisbury had clear grounds of white glass, with vegetal and floral designs as well as geometric patterns, together with borders and coloured edges.

A similar transformation from old to new grisaille windows took place under the patronage of Henry III and Edward I between 1260 and 1280 at Westminster Abbey. Similar styles of glass decoration were to appear at Lincoln Cathedral and in the north transept of York Minster. Between 1260 and 1300 painted grisaille adorned further important church buildings where the patronage of leading clerical administrators encourages a notion of "court" art – at Westminster Abbey, Merton College Chapel in Oxford, Salisbury Cathedral chapter house, York Minster chapter house and its vestibule, and the stairway to Wells Cathedral's chapter house.

There are two collections of grisaille glass at Glastonbury Abbey which illustrate both the established Cistercian type of grisaille glass and the later "court" type. The first is a single piece of glass dating to c. 1190 on which the painting is a combination of stiff leaf foliage on a background of cross-hatchings. The capital sculpture of the Abbey church built after the great fire of 1184 may provide comparable examples of stiff leaf foliage. The second collection dates to the 1280's, and consists of two types of grisaille painting consisting of oak and vine leaves. There are other collections of grisaille too – some fragments from Mr W. J. Wedlake's excavations of the north-west corner of the Abbot's house (1978–1979), and another of two types of grisaille, most likely painted in the fourteenth century.

In spite of being able to associate one collection of grisaille with Mr W.J. Wedlake's excavation, there is a lack of evidence about where pieces were found. One is left to go through reports, singling out mentions of glass and guessing if such and such a piece could have been found there or then. But the glass can be dated by style of painting and from this the abbots who were patrons of glazing schemes were most likely Abbots John of Taunton and John of Kent, although no documentary evidence for this survives.

On the other hand, the name of the glazier of Wells Cathedral in this period is known. John de Bristol also appears on the pay-roll with those craftsmen used in the building of St Stephen's Chapel in London, and it is not fanciful to suggest some royal influence on the patronage of grisaille glazing schemes in Somerset, nor the use of well known workmen. It could well be the case that Abbot John of Taunton was a patron of a glazing scheme using bands of oak and vine grisaille glass in common with other leading clerics like Archbishop John Romeyn of York and Bishop Robert Burnell at Wells.

DESIGN TYPE A

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1347 G30
Drawing no. 21

A broken fragment of glass, with painting of the 1190's, unique to the Abbey's collections of glass fragments. A stiff leaf foliage design, maybe a trefoil, appears on a background of cross-hatchings. The capital sculpture of the Abbey's buildings after the great fire of 1184 provide comparable examples of foliage.

DESIGN TYPE B

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1390 G36
Drawings nos. 22;23

Both pieces, taken from Mr W.J. Wedlake's excavations of the north-west corner of the abbot's house between 1978 and 1979, share the same bordering of two lines. Dating to the late 13th or early 14th centuries, the bordering and oak leaf decoration are close to the culture of grisaille glass painted around the 1290's and used in the abbey.

DESIGN TYPE C

Catalogue no. GLSGA: 1988/1347; G30; GLSGA: 1988/1379 G33
Drawing nos. 24;25;26

All three pieces share the same border design of Type B – that is to say, two lines following each other, the inner the thicker. The bordering is used as a spring for the decoration of the glass, with stems and leaves growing directly from the borders.

The painting of the leaves in all three pieces share common features, where central and subsidiary stems are painted in outline. In addition to the oak and spear ivy leaves, pieces may also have acorns (drawings 24 and 25). Such decoration was popular in the glazing schemes used in the 1290's at York Minster's chapter house, and its vestibule, and in the windows of the stair to the chapter house of Wells. As such the painting may be considered as a part of a "court" style of art.

DESIGN TYPE D

Catalogue nos. GLSGA: 1988/1347 G30; GLSGA: 1988/1379 G33
Drawing no. 27

Dating also to the 1290's the piece shows two grozed edges moving towards one another to fit the tracery pattern of the window. The bordering design is like that types B and C, but the shape of the piece and the painting of the spear ivy's leaf is elaborate. As with the oak leaves of Type B, the leaf here is made up of outlines given additional details of veins and central stems, whose representation is more convincing by the entwining of the leaf around the stem.

CONCLUSION

There can be no doubt that the 12th and 13th century glass collections add to the history of religious art in Somerset. Nowhere else other than at Glastonbury Abbey can such rich painting as that on the 12th century blue glass pieces be found, and the 13th century grisaille

glass certainly points to a style of painting used in important buildings, close to the royal court's administration. Even though there is considerable room for further research on the collections to be carried out, it is important that the Abbey's past artistic glories be known and celebrated.

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