

THE WINDOWS OF CHRIST CHURCH RADLETT

You can learn a lot from a church's windows about its history and its benefactors. Christ Church is no exception, our windows being dedicated to the memory of various benefactors and former members of the congregation. Their, or their relatives', generosity enables us to enjoy the beauty of this artistic endeavour to the glory of God. As you wander around look to see the inscriptions and dedications on or near the windows and you will find names that appear in other places in Radlett. There remain a couple of windows with plain diamond panes. Perhaps they too will one day be redone in modern stained glass to recall some particular event or person.

Are stained glass windows there just to look pretty, or can we learn and take spiritual inspiration from them? Assuming that the answer to the second question is yes, we focussed on the windows in a series of addresses in the summer of 2008. Revs Christopher Newton, Robert Fletcher, Jim Cairns, Reader Jill Whitfield, Capt Alan Dodd and myself as vicar took it in turns to explore the message of our church windows at the Wednesday morning services. In the process we discovered much about the details of the windows that had not occurred to us before and sparked off some interest and discussion among the congregation. In writing this booklet which follows our talks, we hope that others will be led to look with spiritually open eyes and minds at the windows of Christ Church and find encouragement and inspiration.

Broadly there are four main subjects illustrated in these windows – the life of Christ, the apostles and saints of the church, scenes from scripture, angels and Christian symbols.

The pattern of this booklet is intended to take the reader on a tour of the church, booklet in hand, to contemplate these subjects prayerfully and with an open mind. Victorian / Edwardian windows have a particular style which may not be to everyone's taste with all their intricate patterns, but I believe it is worth looking for inspiration by spending the odd hour or half hour having a closer look than a casual glance. And no-one can fail to be struck by the strong and beautiful colours of the earlier windows from the original church by Clayton and Bell.

Of course church windows were made to look beautiful, but they also in days gone by served the purpose of illustrating biblical scenes for congregations who were many of them illiterate or did not have access to their own copy of the bible. It is fortunately easy for most of us to get hold of a bible to read at home, but we can still benefit from these artistic representations of the content and they can inform our reading if we let them.

So, in the words of the well known anthem – *“God be in your head, and in your understanding. God be in your eyes and in your looking.... God be in your heart and in your thinking”* as you read and look around.

THE EAST AISLE – OLD MAIN ALTAR

This window above the main altar of the original church is the oldest and most colourful of all our windows, one of four apparently by the same artist from Clayton and Bell. Dedicated to and by members of the Phillimore family the window contains their coat of arms in the bottom right hand corner and another crest, probably of a relative, on the left.

The theme of this window is the life of Jesus, beginning bottom left with the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary (Luke 1). She appears as in one of the great Renaissance paintings with the Archangel Gabriel and the Holy Spirit in the likeness of a dove.

Above, we see the Visit of the Magi to the infant Christ (Matthew 2). They offer their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, symbolising the kingship, priesthood and death of Jesus. Mary and Joseph look on. Joseph’s three-headed lily is perhaps a sign of the Trinity, or a symbol of perfect peace.

Below to the right, we have moved on to the Garden of Gethsemane. In his agony, Jesus is strengthened by an angel who offers him a chalice, the cup of suffering which he prays (Matthew 26) might be taken from him, but which he accepts if it be the Father’s will. The disciples Peter, James and John lie sleeping, all too humanly unable to maintain the vigil with their Lord.

Above, Jesus is now on the way to Calvary stumbling under the weight of the cross. One of the women of Jerusalem (Luke 23) weeps in the foreground while a soldier strikes Jesus with a club (suspiciously like a Victorian policeman’s truncheon!) and on horseback behind a centurion points the way. Jesus the Lord of All is here the victim, at the command and mercy of those subjecting him to such torture.

Again to the right and below – now we are at Golgotha. Jesus is being stripped by two soldiers who stand on the cross as it waits to receive its burden. To the left a man without a helmet, perhaps a paid collaborator, holds a hammer. This and the previous scene of suffering are unusually vivid. Perhaps in their grief at losing a loved one those

who dedicated this window found comfort in knowing that Christ had suffered before them.

Above, on the cross Jesus is seen with Mary his mother and John the beloved disciple. Is the artist thinking of the moment when Jesus entrusts these two closest people in his earthly life to each other's care (John 19)?

Bottom right – the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea (shown as a young man) and Nicodemus (the elder, with a beard). Mary Magdalene weeps in the foreground. The small insets show i) lambs and rocks, ii) flowers and iii) shows a church (perhaps this one) partially hidden by Mary Magdalene.

Above – the last panel shows the Ascension. Christ's arms are open in blessing. Peter and Andrew are to the right, John to the left and the heads and beards of the remaining disciples can be seen behind.

The story of Jesus from beginning to end. And he himself is the beginning and end of everything, as symbolised by the Alpha (A) and Omega (Ω) higher up in the window. He is with us from birth to death, the fullest expression of God's love and the source of our love, the sharer of our suffering, the pioneer of our journey and the goal to which God draws us and the whole of creation. His story can be found of course in the four Gospels and the Book of Revelation in Scripture, and this is indicated in the window by the traditional signs of the four gospel writers – the divine man for Matthew, lion for Mark, ox for Luke and eagle for John. The signs are repeated in the tile work above the altar. They have their origin in the prophecy of Ezekiel (ch. 1). It is a mysterious vision, but points us to the fulfilment of the prophecy in the story of Jesus as told in the Gospels and Revelation, books which lead us ever deeper into the mystery of God's purpose. "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God.....and we beheld His glory" (John 1 – the well known Christmas reading)

THE EAST WALL.

On the left as you face forward in the church the East Wall has three windows each portraying two characters from scripture. Starting at the front and working backwards you can see – Paul and Barnabas, James the Less and Matthias, and at the back behind the door Simon and Jude. In all these windows the central characters are surrounded by the artistic device of an architectural structure, possibly to suggest

their being in glory, but also possibly just for decorative effect. Above are Christians symbols of the Bible (with cross, quill and sword), and angels each bearing a crown of life for the faithful believer.

Paul and Barnabas. The two great apostles to the Gentiles, but neither of them among the original twelve and not mentioned in the Gospels, only in Acts. Paul is the best known, for his dramatic conversion on the Road to Damascus (Acts 9), where he was intending to carry out a persecution of Christians, and for his Epistles (letters) to the early churches. But Barnabas, whose name means “Son of Encouragement” is a significant figure - accompanying Paul and Mark on mission and encouraging them through difficult times. Both hold books, symbols of the Scriptures, and Paul has a sword, possibly the instrument of his martyrdom, but perhaps more likely the sword of the Spirit, the word of God “*sharper than any two edged sword, piercing to divide soul from spirit, judging the thought and intentions of the heart*” (Hebrews 4). It’s helpful to remember that, like ourselves, neither Paul nor Barnabas were with Jesus in his earthly life but were commissioned to spread the Gospel by faith, trusting in the Holy Spirit of Jesus to empower them.

Matthias and James the Less. We only know about Matthias that he was chosen (Acts 1) to replace Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve. This James is not the apostle James, brother of John, but Jesus’ half brother. At the start of Jesus’ ministry he and his other brothers did not even believe in Jesus (John 7), But he came to believe in him later and emerged as a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 12, 15 + 21) and wrote the letter (Epistle) that bears his name. It is suggested that he may have come to faith after receiving a visit from his resurrected brother Jesus (1Cor 15.7). Why do these two carry an axe and a club? Possibly as a sign of their accepting the risk of martyrdom, or symbolic of their being “soldiers of Christ”?

Simon and Jude. Simon is Simon the Zealot one of the 12 original apostles, but we know no more about him, though we can suppose that the influence of Jesus converted him from the way of the terrorist fanatic to the way of peace and trust in Jesus as Messiah. Jude could be Judas, not Iscariot, one of the 12 or, perhaps more likely, he is Jude, another of Jesus’ half brothers (Matt 13) who wrote the short epistle bearing his name (perhaps this is why he carries a book?). His letter contains a fiery denunciation of errors in some of the churches’ teaching. For the saw and spear, see above – martyrs or soldiers of Christ.

THE SIDE AISLE NORTH WINDOW – (ON THE RIGHT AS YOU LOOK BACK)

“Let every creature praise God’s holy name, for ever and ever, AMEN” (Psalm 145). Another of the four windows of the original church this one was dedicated in 1864 to the memory of Caroline Bagnall. Its beautiful deep colours echo those of the others. There are several parts to the window. On the left are biblical scenes of martyrdom, reminding us of the supreme sacrifice paid by so many of our faith – John the Baptist prophesying to Herod and his wife telling vvv Ecce Agnus Dei (behold the Lamb of God, i.e. Jesus) and “It is not lawful for thee to have her” a dangerous criticism of Herod’s illicit marriage for which John was imprisoned and later beheaded (Matthew 14). The queen, Herodias, does not look too pleased at John’s words!

Then there is Peter in prison (Acts 12) – locked up for preaching the Gospel. But he is visited by the angel of the Lord who comes to release him from the chains, and prison diet, of the gaol.

Stephen, the first Christian martyr, wears a beautiful saintly attire, and is in an attitude of prayer (Acts 7) as the people stone him.

Lastly in this section we see another person whose identity is obscure. Is it Jesus himself teaching the Pharisees, or Jesus at his trial before Pilate with Peter looking on nervously from behind a pillar? Or is it Paul teaching the Greek elders in Athens? Either way we are thinking about the martyr’s death suffered by the one depicted.

In the two roundels are patrons of the church. They are not named but this is a common device in stained glass, to show a patron holding a model of a church building. Notice the sword of the Spirit and the palm branch of peace.

At the top is Christ enthroned in majesty with crown and kingly robes, a figure you will see repeated in the window above the main altar. And he is the focus of the gaze and adoration of the crowd of people shown in the right hand panel of this window who represent the great “crowd of people from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7) carrying palm branches of peace and victory as they worship their Lord. Notice the variety of styles of clothing and profession, rich and poor, old and young, male and female. This is the “great cloud of witnesses”, which we too can belong to, united in worship and praise of God: “The Lord of hosts is his (name)” and “(we) will exalt and praise thy name” they sing as in a psalm or hymn.

This window at the back of church is the one you might notice on leaving the building, a reminder that we go out from this place to worship God in our daily lives, through service to Him and to our fellow creatures in the company and with the support and intercession of the saints and martyrs of past and present.

THE MAIN AISLE NORTH WINDOW (above balcony)

The enlargement of the church in 1900 provided the opportunity, in the large high window at the back of the main aisle, to depict apostles not already shown on the East Wall. The best view of this window (without climbing into the balcony) is from the main high altar, though at this distance some of the detail will escape you, so if you can get access to the balcony or use binoculars it may be worth the effort. Here we have eight of the original twelve apostles chosen by Jesus and listed in the Gospels. Each bears one or more distinguishing sign, though some of these are obscure.

From left to right in the top row – 1. James, the brother of John and son of Zebedee, whose body was supposedly taken to Santiago de Compostela in Spain has a little shell sign on this hat, which is the symbol of Compostela pilgrims and also of the modern ecumenical movement. 2. John, his brother, as usual in windows, is shown as a younger man, having no beard, and is identified as one of the gospel writers by holding a stilus and a writing tablet. 3. Then there is Matthew, also a gospel writer with a quill pen, and 4. Thomas with a set square, possibly because he founded churches, or is it a sign of his inquiring doubtful nature, wanting to measure everything and get it just right?

On the bottom row we have 5. Simon Peter with the keys to the kingdom and the scriptures, then 6. Andrew with his diagonal cross as in the Scottish flag. 7. Philip the Evangelist with cross and bible who, the gospels tell us (John 1 +12) brought others to Christ. Lastly 8. Bartholomew (also called Nathaniel), one of Philip's converts, shown with a knife or dagger – was he a butcher, or some other craftsman? We don't know, but this could also represent the cutting edge of the gospel?

So here we have eight very ordinary people who became special solely because of their faith and obedience to Christ. They followed him, they went out at his command to preach and to heal, most of them died for their faith, and are revered in Christian scripture and history, not least because many churches are named after them.

Above the apostles the window features angels bearing crowns of glory, perhaps not only for the saints in the window, but also for you and other latter-day believers?

THE WEST WALL – SAINTS OF THE CHURCH.

Continue your tour anti-clockwise and find three more modern windows with plenty of plain glass to let in the light. Which has the effect of making the depicted saints with their bright colours stand out more clearly than in some of the older windows. With exception of Michael, who is really an angel, none of these figures appear in scripture,

but their presence reminds us that Christian history continues to unfold. Perhaps new saints will one day be added in the remaining plain glass window? Notice the haloes of the saints, and see how the halo of Christ in other windows is different showing the cross incorporated into the halo, a common device in church windows.

In the first window nearest the back Saints Wilfred, Hilda and Bede – saints of the English church at a time when it was threatened by invasions of pagan Angles, Saxons and Vikings, and divided between the Celtic and Roman traditions. **Wilfred** was born in 634. He travelled widely despite the difficult condition of the roads and was partly responsible for the ascendancy of the Roman over the Celtic tradition in this country. He founded Ripon Abbey and became Archbishop of York and was a gifted missionary. Notice the Christian fish symbol!

Hilda grew up in a household divided between Christian and pagan ways. Violence and murder were common in those troubled times. She decided to become a nun and founded Whitby abbey which unusually was a mixed foundation having originally 12 monks and 12 nuns. The monastery grew and the place was chosen for the famous synod at which the Roman way was formally established over the Celtic tradition. The venerable **Bede** (673-735) a monk of Jarrow was a scholar and historian of the English Church. He was the first to use the term Anno Domini in dates, and the only English scholar to be mentioned in Dante's Paradiso.

In the next window are Margaret of Scotland, Richard of Chichester and St Francis of Assisi. Quite why these three and the previous saints are selected is uncertain - possibly a personal preference of the donating families – but all are exemplary Christian leaders who stand out in the history of the church in different ways. The church needs gifted and devoted leaders and patrons – pray that we might have such people in this and future generations.

Margaret, an Anglo-Saxon princess was born in 1046. After education in Hungary, she was married to Malcolm III of Scotland. Her devotion as a believer is symbolised by her cross and bible or prayer book. Though not always popular with the Scots who reproach her for enforcing southern, English and Roman, ways on a church that was previously rich in the Celtic tradition, she was responsible for founding many monasteries, churches and pilgrim hostels including Dunfermline, whose Abbey is pictured here.

Francis lived in the 12th and 13th Century. After a difficult youth capture in battle leading to a spell in prison, he became a devoted carer of the poor and lepers, and

restorer of disused churches. Feeling the call to “go and repair my church” he founded the Franciscan order (who wear brown habits). Their rule one of poverty and combines prayer and devotion in community life with active engagement with the poor and needy, self-sacrifice for others as Christ gave himself on the cross. Francis is remembered for his closeness to nature (hence the bird and the dog) and for his prayer that is now a hymn – “Make me a channel of your peace...”

Richard, a Norman bishop, was renowned for his pastoral style of leadership travelling his diocese on foot, visiting and caring for clergy and people – notice his bible and chalice, signs of his ministry!

Nearest the front of the main aisle you can find the Archangel Michael, St Alban and St George.

Michael, the Archangel (distinguished in the picture by his wings!), features in the Book of Daniel, the Letter of Jude and Revelation in the Bible. He is described as the chief of princes who protects God’s people Israel, a warring angel who leads the angelic hosts to defeat their enemies, including in Revelation the Devil. His flaming sword and crown or helmet of fire are signs of the Holy Spirit at work in him, and the scales symbolise justice and judgement. His name – Mi Cha El – in Hebrew means “Who is like God?”, to which we can only reply Who indeed! An archangel perhaps more than other beings, but scripture is mysterious about angels (God’s messengers) who are sometimes described as ordinary people and then, within a few verses, referred to as God himself.

Alban, the patron saint of this diocese, became the first English martyr in 250. He is shown with a palm branch as a symbol of honour and peace. His sword does not show he was a soldier, but rather signifies his acceptance of the instrument of his execution for sheltering a persecuted Christian Priest in the Roman city of Verulanium, now St Albans. Converted to the faith by this priest who so impressed him with his prayers, Alban enabled his father in God to escape by dressing himself in the priest’s cloak and so getting arrested and beheaded in his place. Truly the sacrificial death of one “who laid down his life for his friend”! Notice the miniature of the Abbey which contains his shrine!

George, patron saint not only of England but of Catalonia and various other countries and cities, is widely venerated, but the story of his slaying the dragon is a myth arising probably from an early confusion of portraits of him with those of Michael defeating

the Devil (“that ancient serpent”) in Revelation, or even with Perseus killing the sea monster in Greek mythology. Mythical it may be, but he has become understood as one of God’s servants who triumph over evil. English nationalist and right wingers who make overmuch use of his flag would be surprised to learn that the historical George was a Palestinian Arab Christian, martyred in 304 at Lydda.

WEST TRANSEPT (to right of organ) AND MEDITATION CHAPEL (curtained left)

When Christ Church was first built the present east side aisle was the whole church. The **west transept** window was actually moved to its new site when the church was increased in size. These two windows closely match each other and the windows at front and rear of the side aisle, and together make a set of four which were the first to be completed. All four are by the same artists working for Clayton and Bell. Christian symbols, decorative motifs and patterns are repeated, and all four show scenes from the life of Jesus.

At the top of both window are Greek letters. The Α and Ω, alpha and omega, being the first and last letters of the alphabet echo Christ’s words in the Book of Revelation (Ch 21): “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end...” reminding us that Christ is present at the start and end of our lives, and at the start and eventual end of the whole of creation. Then there are IHC and XP the first letters of the Greek words IHCOUC XPICTOC (Iesous Christos), the holy name of Jesus Christ in the original language of the New Testament.

The main panels of the west transept window show the scene related in Luke’s Gospel (Ch 2) when Jesus at the age of 12 remains in Jerusalem while Mary and Joseph set out back to Nazareth after the Passover festival. Jesus remains in the temple debating and discussing with the elders (on the left) and is only discovered by his anxious parents (on the right) three days later. On being rebuked by Mary, Jesus replies: “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”. Mary’s complaint (“Why have you treated us like this?”) is a touching reminder that Jesus knew the tears and smiles of an ordinary human childhood. In the picture Jesus is seated in the place of honour while the elders have left their comfortable seats to listen with amazement to his learning and understanding of scripture (shown as a book, though it would actually have been a scroll in those days!). Notice the plain haloes of Mary and Joseph, while that of Jesus contains a cross – a common artistic device to show which Jesus is, but also a sign of the suffering for which he is destined and through which alone he will win our forgiveness and access to life eternal. The rich colours of the clothes, although

probably most unlike those actually worn at the time, are maybe artistic licence, but very beautiful, and point to the significance of the characters portrayed. At the bottom of the window are symbols of the Crucifixion – crown of thorns, hammer and nails and the cross itself.

Cross over to the **Meditation chapel** (curtained off on East side) and notice the similar layout, beautiful deep colours and symbolism of this window. See the same Greek characters and more symbols of the suffering of Jesus – the chalice, whipping post and scourge, the spear, sponge soaked in vinegar and dice with which the soldiers gambled for his seamless cloak.

The main panels show the Gospel passage from Mark 10, often read at Baptisms, where people bring their children for Jesus to bless them, but are shooed away by the disciples. Jesus, however, welcomes the children and takes them in his arms. Modern congregations can sometimes be impatient at the perceived disturbance caused by the presence of children and communicate their irritation to embarrassed parents who are then not seen in church again. Jesus not only reminds us to welcome and rejoice in the presence of the little ones, but goes on to tell grown ups to learn from them and to adopt their spontaneous curiosity, enthusiasm and willingness to learn – “Unless you receive the Kingdom of God like a little child you will never enter it!”. Scripture contains many other passages that encourage us to pass on the message to the next generation. Notice the decorative details of the picture which contribute to the theme of joy and delight in the innocence and beauty of the children’s minds. While in the Meditation Chapel take time to look at the statue of the risen Christ above the altar and the exciting and mysterious triptych painting by Tom Walker with the explanation beneath. The more you look at it the more the painting changes and you see new things you hadn’t noticed at first!

THE MAIN HIGH ALTAR

Complete your tour of the windows by moving through the choir stalls to the High Altar where the main window echoes the theme of the old main window described above, not so much the life, but the death and resurrection of Christ. This is the window which, together with the reredos beneath provides the focus of the eye for most congregations during worship. Central to the window, and central to the Christian faith, is the cross of Christ, the place where He died to redeem the sins of the whole world and from which He rose to open the gates of life eternal to all who believe and put their trust in Him. As in many depictions of the scene we see Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John, the beloved disciple and author of the fourth Gospel, to either side of the cross, and Mary Magdalene at its foot. “Lignum Crucis Arbor

Scientie” (motto of the Woodard .chools) – The wood of the cross is the tree of knowledge. Here at the cross the Christian finds the most powerful demonstration of the love of God poured out for us, here we find healing and forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

Below, if we take the scenes in chronological order, is the Tomb, and then the Resurrection appearance to Mary Magdalene, with an angel in between.

And so to the image of the ascended Christ in Majesty at the top of the window, which could also have been the first in the series for Christ, the Alpha and Omega, was there in majesty at the beginning of creation, but perhaps only revealed as such under the new covenant of the Christian era. The worshippers eyes are naturally drawn upwards to this image, and so are our thoughts by the words of hymns and prayer. “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Colossians) and “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet” (Hebrews).

Crucifixion and burial, resurrection and ascension to reign in glory! So in this church window we have another window into ever powerful, everlasting life and energy of the God who loves us. To him be glory and majesty, praise and thanksgiving, now and for ever, AMEN.