

Some Things you may not know about Memorial Stained Glass Windows in Churches

Introduction

As most readers will know, "stained glass" is the term used for pieces of coloured glass joined together by strips of lead to form a picture or design. Stained glass is most often used for windows, because the beauty of the glass is best seen when light passes through it.

It was during the Middle Ages that the making of stained-glass windows developed as a major art. Stained-glass windows were an important feature of churches built in the Gothic style, which first arose in the mid-1100's. The windows filled the church interiors with light and color, delighting worshipers with their beauty.

Prime Purposes

The windows were not only beautiful; they also served an educational purpose. During the Middle Ages, the church was the centre of learning. There were few books, and only a handful of people could read. The designs in the first stained-glass windows usually depicted scenes from the Bible. Such scenes were important tools in teaching Christian beliefs to the people.

All stained glass windows have a number of important functions to fulfil. The main purpose of painting pictures in coloured glass was to tell a story and to keep the building water tight and let light in. They teach through their words and figures, they decorate and please the eye of the beholder and above all they provide a fitting background to the worship of the church. They are a background to devotion in that as the eye moves around the building either during worship or at times of visits, the window fixes the eye of the observer and guides the mind back to God through the story being told.

Stained glass windows also slow us down; they incline us to proceed reverently and lower our

voices. It is atmospheric. In churches and cathedrals it speaks as the voice in the burning bush "the place whereon thou standest is holy ground".

Many churches can look drab and dull on the outside. And from the outside, the windows look drab, dull, and unexciting, blending in with the stone composing the building facade. But step inside, and the windows

look spectacular. The sunlight outside passes through the stained glass, which lets different wavelengths of light through.

Medieval masonry used the trick of light to symbolize one thing - that faith may look drab to outsiders, but inside, people see the beauty of it that is impossible to see from the outside.

Colour Symbolism

But perhaps most of all, the colours in the glass – blue and red dominating, combined with gold and sometimes purple, violet and yellow – contribute to a boldness which is very much part of the meaning of the window.

Aside from religious teachings contained with colored segments of glass, there is also significance and symbolism behind the usage of certain colors in religious stained glass. The next time you view a window, keep in mind these color meanings:

Red: represents the blood of Christ, it indicates strong emotions such as love or hate, but also courage and self-sacrifice; it serves as a reminder of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice, it also often associated with the martyrdom of saints.

Blue: the color of the sky symbolizes heaven, hope, sincerity, and piety. It is also the color of meditation, contemplation and loyalty. The Virgin Mary is usually clothed in blue.

Green: the color of grass and nature, is an indication of spring, new beginnings, growth, rebirth, youth, and life over death; it also symbolizes faith, hope and victory, overcoming ignorance and indifference, immortality, and contemplation.

Gold is a symbol of God, divinity and the treasures of heaven. It means spiritual achievement and all that is good. Halos are gold for this reason.

Violet or purple is the union of wisdom and love: it symbolizes love, truth, passion, and justice. It is the color of royalty (it is believed that Christ wore purple before His crucifixion so

December

the color has come to symbolize suffering and endurance). It is also the color that represents chastity, innocence, and purity is often associated with God. When combined with white it symbolizes humility and purity.

White is used to portray innocence, joy, purity, faith and piousness.

A Final Personal Function

These windows have also continued to tell another story, that of the people who have donated the window or are commemorated in them. By inscriptions and depictions the glass records for posterity the whole story of their installation and purpose. And so they have historical, artistic, theological and personal significance.

This appears to be the prime rationale behind the commissioning of the windows at Camberwell Uniting Church. All our windows commit to posterity true servants and fine leaders of our congregation, with a matching theological quotation consistent with the memory and life lived of the individual concerned.

Memorial Windows of Camberwell Uniting (Methodist) Church

Eleanor Williamson

Introduction

The separate article in this edition which provided some background to the history of stained glass windows in churches highlighted, among other things, that strong red, blue, green and gold colours tend to be favoured when designing memorial windows, principally due their dramatic effect when light penetrates the glass.

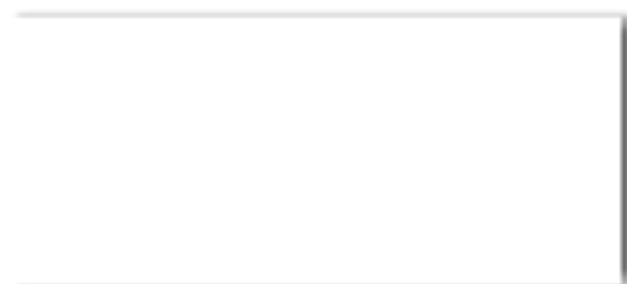
This general rule applies to the majority of windows in our church, however there is one exception, and that is the memorial window dedicated to the memory of Eleanor Williamson.

Personal Details

Official public records yielded only limited information about 'our' Eleanor Williamson (there were other women of the same name living over a similar time period). Eventually I believe that Eleanor was born in 1860 in Richmond.

On 23 January 1897, aged 37 years, Eleanor Judd married Thomas Williamson, who was 17 years older than her. Their first child, (Thomas Reginald) was born in 1898. Then followed two

8



daughters, namely Annie Stuart (b. 1901) and Mary Frances (b. 1903).

On May 13, 1942, Eleanor, by then a widow, died suddenly at her house in 55 Camberwell Road Auburn, and was taken to Springvale Crematorium for burial.

The Memorial Window

This is a truly unique window among those on display at our Church. There are no striking and dominant reds, blues greens or gold. There are no big straight lines, no shafts of strong, prime colours or rich gold, and no images of swords, crowns, or kings.

Instead we find a calming image, filled with soft, curving lines, and muted colours featuring purple, violet, pink and white, matched by softer by greens and blues.

It is an image which captures and is consistent with the colour symbolism attributed to church glasswork – these colours represent a person who is remembered for her love, truth, passion, and desire for justice. One whose innocence is complemented by humility and purity.

The memorial window

to Eleanor Williamson carries the dedication "The Gift of her daughter." But which one, Annie or Mary?

It was not until I found an item on the unveiling of the window, that I was able to find an answer to this question and gain some more insight into one

the more devoted members of our congregation at the time.

Memorial Window Unveiled

“Mother’s Day (Sunday 9 May 1943) was observed at Camberwell Church in the presence of a full congregation and by a special service which included the unveiling of a beautiful stained glass memorial window, the subject of which is “Of such is the Kingdom of Heaven,” the gift of Miss Molly Williamson,(2 a teacher in the Sunday School, in loving memory of her mother, for many years a regular worshipper at Camberwell.

The service was conducted by the Rev. E.L. Vercoe, and with him was associated Senior Chaplain the Rev. F.C. Bremer, a close family friend, who performed the unveiling ceremony.

The senior Chaplain spoke with deep feeling and affection for the late Mrs Williamson in regard to her home life and example, and her interest in her Church, following which he unveiled and dedicated the memorial.

The subject of the Senior Chaplain’s sermon was the story of the lesson, that of Hagar and Ismael (the moral of which, briefly stated, is that when all seems lost, do not lose faith in God, he will hear your cry, and come to your aid).

Favourite hymns of the deceased lady were sung during the service, whilst Mr Chris Reekie impressively rendered the soli “If With All Your Hearts” and “I Come to Thee.”

Mr Vercoe, in accepting the gift on behalf of the Trustees, expressed their appreciation of the donor.

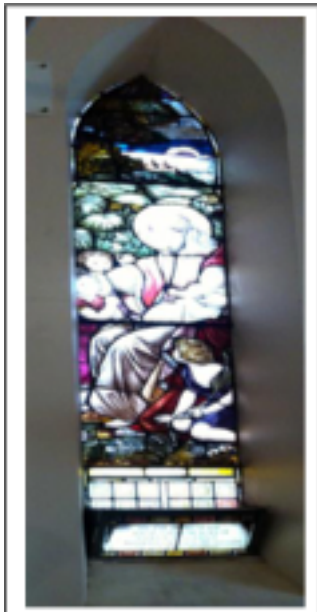
The choir was heard to advantage in “The King of Love” (Shelley), the solo work being creditably done by Mr Alan Day. Mrs H.S. Tregaskis, as usual, presided at the organ.”

After the Event.....

Just over a year after the death of her mother, on 9 September 1944, Miss Molly Williamson married Arthur Collinson, of Riversdale Road, at our Camberwell Methodist Church.

Molly and Arthur Collinson lived all their life in Camberwell, and continued to attend Sunday Service for many years, where she was able to be comforted by the dedication to her mother's memory, until she died on 11 November 1993, aged 90 years. A life well lived.

Astute readers of the December Kairos recollect seeing Molly's face in the photo of the Camberwell Church Ladies taken in the 1970s. Unsurprisingly perhaps Molly is wearing mostly purple, mauve and pink, matching the colours of the window.



The unusual window erected in memory of Eleanor Williamson was the subject of comment 4 years after its installation.

In 1947, a sub-committee of the Church Building Committee prepared a 'Report on the Interior of the Camberwell Methodist Church', aimed at visual and structural improvement of the Church's interior.

Point 3 of the Report stated that "the colour and craftsmanship of the Eleanor Williamson window and that of Rev. John Gault are vastly different and competitive. It is unfortunate that they are paired. Both would be improved by separating them. Suggestion: the Williamson window is moved to occupy the first window from the entrance on the right hand side of the Church."

You, dear reader, can be the judge about that. It obviously bothered someone at the time, although it appears that no action was taken on this recommendation.