Stained Glass Notes

Armorial Glass:



Why was Burrell so interested in English armorial glass: This was not so much for its own intrinsic merit but from personal interest. His original idea was to have the best collection of English stained glass and from this he was led on to continental glass. The Fawsley Hall set of 39 panels of 16th century English armorial glass is the finest of its kind in the country and is unique in that it all relates to one family - the Knightleys. Burrell "stalked" the set for ten years and it was finally bought and paid for by Glasgow Corporation in 1948 from Burrell funds . For details of this "saga" see pp. 171-173 of "Burrell" by Richard Marks.

Yellow Stain:



How is the very bright coloured yellow obtained which one sees in so much stained glass: Glass consists of three main ingredients, sand, the ash from trees and lime. These three components are melted together in a crucible (or pot) at around 1300°C. At this stage the various different colours are made by adding chemical oxides: i.e. cobalt oxide = blue glass; iron oxide = green glass; sulphur dioxide = yellow glass, etc. Glass coloured in this way is known as "pot metal" and the colour is consistent density throughout the glass. In the middle of the 14th century a technique was discovered known as yellow staining (sometimes known as silver staining). The process is as follows: Silver nitrate powder is mixed with water and a binding medium (honey, vinegar or gum arabic) and painted on to the outside of the glass. The piece of glass is then fired in a kiln c.600 C and the silver nitrate "dissolves" into the glass, staining the glass yellow. Yellow is the only colour which can be put on in this way. This technique allows the artist to put a yellow stain on clear glass thus avoiding the over use of lead to separate different colours. The reason why it often appears "bright" yellow is that the stain sometimes protects the glass from corrosion and so the unstained parts may appear darker and duller in comparison.

Maintenance of Stained Glass:



How is the glass cleaned: As carefully as possible. In most cases a gentle clean with a cotton swab and deionised water is sufficient.

How durable is the lead in the windows: Generally speaking, lead deteriorates and has to be replaced every 100 years. Most medieval glass will have been re-leaded several times in its history. However, there are exceptions. The Marriage at Cana window is 800 years old and still has its original lead. It is not alone in the collection.

Acquisition of Stained Glass:

How did Burrell manage to acquire pieces from, for example, Westminster Abbey: During restoration-many broken windows are taken out and replaced by new ones. The old windows which are not put back would be left in the workshops and often forgotten about, or else dismantled and bits of them used to make a new window. The pieces thus left were often sold to dealers or else destroyed, as the glazier would have no further use for them.

How did these pieces of glass come to be sold in the first place - Visitors often wonder why they are not in their original church: After the French Revolution many churches fell upon hard times

and were forced to sell their treasures and sometimes these would include glass. One man from Norfolk, John Christopher Hampp, is known to have brought over 17 crates of glass from Rouen and surrounding towns. Much foreign glass in the Collection (and others throughout Britain) owe their transportation across the Channel to Hampp. He sold the glass at Christies at four sales: 1804; 1808;1816;1820. In addition to the poverty of the churches, tastes did change as they are changing now, eg Victorian glass was not greatly prized a few years ago but opinions are changing and it is increasing in value. At the beginning of the 18th century medieval glass was frowned upon as being "bad taste", so many poor churches were pleased to sell windows for ready cash. There was also the Reformation, wars, in England the dissolution of the monasteries. It is surprising how much has survived.

Notes on Specific glass:

The vivid colours and good detail of the Swiss Mueller glass is very striking: Yes, this is a very fine example of enamelling at its best. Up to this time it had not been possible to achieve such a transparency using enamels. The colours also are very intense in this panel. Enamels are finely ground glass particles which are fused onto the surface of glass at a high temperature. The results often look grainy or washed out in comparison to "pot metal" colours, and they also have a tendency to flake off. The Swiss Glass Painters of the 16th & 17th centuries mastered the technique of enamels and produced some beautiful little windows.



How is Jeremiah identified: The inscription on the panel is from Jeremiah 31-22 - "The Lord has created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall compass a man".



The "Life of Christ" window looks very dirty: No, it is not dirty, but it is very badly corroded and not very much can be done to improve this.



Why does John the Baptist have a red halo: Artistic licence? There are many instances of different coloured haloes which can be seen just by looking at a book on stained glass. e.g:

Virgin Mary red halo Freiburg 14th century Saint pink Toledo 15th century St .Thomas Becket blue English 16th century Christ red Florence 16th century etc...

These are just a sample taken at random in one book.