

St Giles' Church Camberwell



The East Window

A description of the glass in the Ruskin window

Price 50 pence

History

The tracery of the East Window was designed for the new St. Giles' Church by John Ruskin, and the rest of it by his friend Edmund Oldfield. It is 13th. century in style, consisting of a very large number of small pictures giving the general effect of a mosaic at a distance. The pictures follow a sequence from Creation to the End of Time. They are all biblical in character.

According to Ruskin the design was mainly Oldfield's, but the rich colours, predominately red and purple, are based on the magnificent mediaeval glass of Chartres and other French cathedrals which Ruskin visited in 1844 especially to get ideas for St. Giles'. The glass was made by the firm of Ward and Nixon.

The task of raising the money for the window was undertaken by the Ladies Committee. At the consecration in 1845 the window was not complete, the four outer vertical panels being plain glass. I do not know the date of final completion.

Each panel of the four lights (other than the centre) contains alternately two semi-circular pictures which will be indicated as L (left) and R (right) respectively, and one circular indicated as C.

The Left Hand Panel

Starting from the bottom of the left hand light we have:

- L. The Spirit of God (the Dove) moving over the face of the waters.
- R. The Creation of Man.
- C. Plucking the Forbidden Fruit.
- L. The expulsion from Eden.
- R. The murder of Abel.
- C. The sacrifice of Noah.
- L. The building of Babel.
- R. Hagar and the Angel.
- C. Abraham's three heavenly visitors.
- L. Lot and his wife fleeing from Sodam.
- R. Isaac blessing Jacob.
- C. Jacob's dream of the ladder.
- L. Jacob wrestling with the Angel.

R. Esau embracing Jacob.
C. Reuben pleading with his brethren for Joseph.

In the Apex (very small):

L. The burning bush.
R. Moses keeping Jethro's flock.

In the small circles are represented the heads of the Patriarchs and Prophets.

The Second Panel from the Left

In the second light from the left, beginning at the bottom, we have:

C. The Angel destroying the first-born in Egypt.
L. Moses with the tables of law.
R. Saint Michael and the Devil disputing about the body of Moses.
C. The Priest bearing the Ark at Jordan.
L. Samuel relating his vision to Eli.
R. Saul chosen King.
C. David with Goliath's head.
L. Nathan and David.
R. Fire from heaven consuming sacrifices.
C. The leprosy of King Uzziah.
L. Elijah taken up in a whirlwind.
R. The spirit of Elijah resting on Elisha.
C. Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.
L. and R. The vision of Ezekiel.

In the apex:
Ahasuerus crowning Esther.

The Centre Panel

The centre light contains five circles reading upwards:

The Nativity
Our Lord triumphant over temptation
The Crucifixion

The Resurrection
The Ascension

The Head of the Window

In the tracery on the left is a cinquefoil depicting Our Lord's Baptism, and on the right a cinquefoil concerned with the Holy Eucharist.

The great circle in the head of the windows comprises within it three smaller cinquefoils. In the left is "the woman clothed with the sun" (Revelations 12.v.1); on the right "the binding of the dragon for a thousand years" (Revelations 20.v.1-3) and in the highest cinquefoil is depicted The Final Judgement.

The Second Panel from the Right

The second light from the right hand side reading upwards is as follows:

- C. An angel presenting his light to the Church.
- L. The choosing of Matthias.
- R. The descent of the Holy Ghost.
- C. The stoning of Stephen.
- L. Saint Peter rebuking Simon Magus.
- R. Phillip baptising the Eunuch.
- C. The conversion of Saint Paul.
- L. Ananias baptising Paul.
- R. Saint Peter raises Dorcas.
- C. Saint Peter's vision.
- L. Descent of the Holy Ghost on the Gentiles.
- R. The beheading of Saint James.
- C. Saint Peter is delivered from prison.
- L. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15).
- R. Saint Paul before Agrippa.

The apex:
Saint Paul on the island of Melita.

The heads of the twelve Apostles are represented in the smaller circles.

The Right Hand Panel

The right hand light is as follows:

L. Saint Peter as Apostle to the Jews.

R. Saint Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles.

C. Saint John the Divine.

L. Sin enters into the world.

R. And so death.

C. The triumph of death.

L. The Law and Mount Sinai.

R. The new Jerusalem.

C. The supersession of the law (expulsion of Hagar).

L. The High Priest of the old covenant.

R. Christ as the High Priest.

C. Abram gives tithes to Melchisedec.

L. The triumph of the Anti-Christ.

R. The overthrow of the Anti-Christ.

C. The destruction of death.

In the apex, the Spirit as a dove is seen over Christ crucified (half length),
from whose side water is caught in a paten and blood in a chalice.