

“IT’S ONLY VICTORIAN”
a Statement of Significance for the stained glass windows
at St Petroc church, Bodmin

Michael G. Swift

“There’s no real stained glass for you here – it’s only Victorian!”

This was the comment that greeted me some years ago when I arrived to record the stained glass in the parish church of a Cornish town: I hasten to add the town was not Bodmin! The comment is typical of an outmoded attitude that the only stained glass worthy of the name was either medieval or occasional examples of modern designs: anything of the long Victorian period (defined for the purposes of this article as nineteenth century and twentieth up to 1918) was not worthy of consideration. Considering that practically all the stained glass at St Petroc’s was inserted in a fifty year period around the 1880s it would seem therefore that its windows fall into that category and are therefore ‘of no interest’.

The purpose of this article is to challenge this attitude, and to show that these stained glass windows, when read with care and background knowledge, do contain a great deal of interest, and have many points of significance within the religious, social, and economic contexts of the decades when they were inserted.

The location of the windows is indicated by using the C.V.M.A. nomenclature where each window is numbered consecutively from the east window either in a north or south direction. Each window is also given a descriptive label.

Bodmin St Petroc windows Window nomenclature

CVMA Descriptive nomenclature

- e1** Chancel East
- s2** South Chapel East ‘Clara Gilbert’.
- s3** South Chapel South 1 ‘John Gilbert’
- s4** South Chapel South 2 Masonic decorative ‘Robert Edyvean’
- s5** South Chapel South 3 ‘William Hicks’
- s6** South Aisle 1 ‘Colonel Stabb’
- s7** South Aisle 2 ‘Egyptian Campaign 1882-6’.
- s8** South Aisle 3 ‘Mary Henderson’
- s9** South Aisle 4 Cathedral tinted, no bulls-eyes
- s10** South Aisle 5 Decorative panels ‘Parkyn’
- s11** South Aisle West Cathedral tinted with bulls-eyes
- W1** West ‘Wallis’
- n11** North Aisle west Cathedral tinted with bulls-eyes
- n10** North Aisle 5 Cathedral tinted with bulls-eyes

- n9** **North Aisle 4** Decorative panels, RF in tracery
- n8** **North Aisle 3** '1st World War memorial'.
- n7** **North Aisle 2** 'South African campaign 1899-1902'.
- n6** **North Aisle 1** Decorative panels with WHL
- n5** **North Chapel North 3** Star motif
- n4** **North Chapel North 2** Star motif
- n3** **North Chapel North 1** 'Watkin'
- n2** **North Chapel East** 'Ashton/Inglis'

Window e1. Chancel east, 1898

This impressive five-light window shows the Ascension of Christ with St Michael in the lower section, flanked by a rich assortment of biblical and later personages. It was inserted in 1898¹ and dedicated by his friends to the Chief Constable, Colonel Walter Raleigh Gilbert. The window was designed and made by the prestigious firm of Clayton and Bell, who ten years earlier had secured the largest commission for stained glass in the whole Victorian period, namely the complete glazing scheme for Bishop Edward White Benson's new Cathedral at Truro. Clayton and Bell immediately became the 'go to' firm for many Cornish churches² in the following years, and it is no coincidence that the design of this window has many similarities to the great east window at Truro cathedral. Their windows in the last decades of the nineteenth century were highly regarded for their religious accuracy, rich colouring and highly accomplished glass painting, especially of facial features.

One of the most interesting features of the window is the identification of the various accompanying saints. Unlike the Truro window, they do not have their names in each nimbus, and one must rely on the attribute accompanying each figure. Moses' ten commandment tablets and Peter's keys are easy, but some of the post-Gospel figures are a challenge!

However, the post-medieval stained glass glazing of Bodmin actually started some seventy years earlier, when a stained glass window (also portraying the Ascension) was inserted in Chancel east by the London firm of Lowe in 1824³. The window was donated by Francis Basset, Lord de Dunstanville, and inserted in the year of his second marriage. It was an enamel painted window on rectangular panes of plain glass without lead-lines. This was the accepted artistic style in the 1820's and was the earliest stained glass window in a Cornish church in the nineteenth century. As enamel painted windows were totally disapproved of by the Tractarians and Ecclesiologists of the 1830s and '40s, this style was soon to be superseded by the medieval mosaic construction⁴. Today, the only other Cornish enamel painted window to survive is John Pike Hedgeland's Transfiguration at Saint Michael, Helston. By the end of the century both the Bodmin and Helston windows were regarded as anachronistic and replaced by something whose colour and style were far more acceptable to current tastes.

Window s2. South Chapel east, 1886

This six-light window is the largest in St Petroc's and was made in 1886 by the Plymouth firm of Fouracre & Watson. It was their largest single commission in Cornwall. Many of the firm's Cornish commissions owed much to their Masonic connections; the firm's earliest windows were for the Masonic Lodge in Bodmin. The window, donated by Revd Walter Raleigh Gilbert, husband (widower) of dedicatee Mrs Clara Gilbert. The donor's family formerly owned Priory House, Bodmin. Mrs Gilbert was the daughter of John Williams of Caerhays Castle. This commission was probably the result of John Fouracre's connections to some of the most important and influential families in Cornwall.⁵

This most ambitious window shows a mixture of Fouracre's familiar pre-Raphaelite design and artistic styles together with some highly individual features. Below a tracery of angels gathered around a crowned central angel holding a reaping hook, the main six lights show figures of six allegorical Christian virtues. These are set above six Biblical characters, whilst along the base each of the six predella panels shows a scene from that biblical character. Below each of the twelve main figures is a typical Fouracre panel of foliage, and the inscription is Fouracre's usual white gothic script in black background.⁶ The extension of allegoric figures of the Christian virtues beyond the usual Faith, Hope and Charity became common after 1890, and this window was an early example for Cornish churches.

The colouring of the window is rich and varied, with sufficient used of white glass to allow enough light in and prevent the whole being too gloomy. Among the unusual features is the use of personal images to portray Mrs Gilbert and her sisters in the representations of Charity, Faith, Hope, Fortitude and Patience. It looks as if their children's likenesses are used in the Charity light as well and were probably painted from photographs.

The window, and in particularly the predella panels, suffer from a severe loss of paint detail, a defect unusual for Fouracre's windows, and this seriously detracts from the window's effectiveness. Despite this defect, the artistic ambition together with the complex iconography and social context makes this window the most significant in the church.

Window s3. South Chapel south 1, 1898

A second Clayton & Bell window, also inserted in 1898, is in memory of John Pomeroy Gilbert, second son of Revd Walter Raleigh Gilbert, who died 8th July 1898 aged 8.⁷ The Arms, crest and motto of Gilbert of The Priory, Bodmin are in the tracery. The four predella scenes from the childhood of Christ are all done with the quality of design, colour and glass painting that made this firm's reputation, but it is the main lights showing the ever-popular Victorian subject of Suffer Little Children which are the most accomplished parts of the window. The period's high rates of child mortality explain why this iconography was regularly requested by donors, but the portrayal of certain figures suggest, as in window **s2**, the use of personal images probably from photographs for both the parents and children.

Window s4. South Chapel south 2, 1884

It would be a mistake to dismiss this non-pictorial window. At first sight, the repetitive roundel and diamond motifs, set in square decorated quarries, seems to have little interest. The window was inserted at the 1884 restoration,⁸ in a prominent position in the Lady Chapel, as a memorial to Robert Edyvean, who died 18th September 1880, and tells us a

great deal about him. His initials appear six times in the diamond motifs together with crowns, fleur-de-lys and roses, which are mirrored in the foliage background quarries. But it is in the tracery where the main interest lies, with the clear emblems of Masonic tools such as the set-square and compass. Mr Edyvean was a prominent Mason in this part of Cornwall⁹.

Window s5. South Chapel south 3, 1869

This last window in the Lady Chapel is an earlier Clayton & Bell of 1869,¹⁰ dedicated to William Robert Hicks, JP, of Bodmin, formerly Superintendent of the County Lunatic Asylum, who died 5th September 1868. In its style and colours, it reflects the earlier years of the studio. The iconography seems entirely appropriate to the profession of the dedicatee with its emphasis on acts of healing and miracles.

Sadly, this is another window, like window **s2**, whose effectiveness is diminished through paint loss.¹¹

Window s6. South Aisle 1, 1890

Moving into the South Aisle we find the first of several windows commemorating the memory of members of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry over many campaigns. It is another Clayton & Bell design, inserted in 1890.¹² It is the only D.C.L.I. window in the church with a single dedication, to Colonel Henry Sparke Stabb, 1st Battalion the DCLI, who died 22nd October 1888 at Pietermaritzburg. It was donated by Officers, NCOs and men of the Regiment. The arms of his family and of the D.C.L.I. are in the tracery.

The choice of subjects in the main lights and predellas is significant in terms of what was at that date considered appropriate for military and war memorial windows. The two central saints (Bishop Saint Germain and Saint Mawes) reference the Cornish Christian heritage, as indeed does Saint Michael. Saint Alban was always a popular military choice as a soldier and a Christian martyr. The predellas are all directly related to the main subjects – Saint Alban's martyrdom, the next two saints teaching, and Saint Michael's triumph of good over evil, suggesting the theme of a just war.

Window s7. South Aisle 2, 1891

One year later the theme of St Michael triumph of good over evil was repeated in this window by Clayton & Bell, again for the Egyptian campaign of 1882-5. It introduces new themes to military memorials, where Longinus at the foot of the Cross marks the conversion of a soldier to Christianity. Saint Piran is shown preaching, whilst the patronal saint Petroc protects a hunted stag. These were amongst the earliest representations in stained glass of these pivotal Cornish saints since medieval stained glass.

The dedication is in memory of Lieut. Colonel C.E. Le M Cherry, Major J.J.F. Grant, Lieutenants A. Morrison, J.T. Bowles, A.D. Homfray, five Sergeants and 93 Rank and File of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry who lost their lives during the Egyptian campaigns and occupation 1882–1886. The officers are all identified individually by name, whereas the other ranks simply by totals of fatalities.

If the changes in the iconography of war memorial windows are of interest to the viewer, it is worth moving across to North Aisle **n7** and **n8** windows.

Window s8, South Aisle 3, 1892

The next window was inserted one year later¹³ and also by Clayton & Bell. The dedicatee is Mary Henderson, wife of Mr George Henderson, JP. In contrast to the previous military subjects, this iconography is entirely feminine. The tone is set in the tracery with three of the Beatitudes, blessed are the meek, the poor in spirit, and the pure in heart. Victorian memorial windows to wives and mothers frequently stressed the Christian character of the deceased, and this is a fine example of its type. The four saints, Anna, The Blessed Virgin Mary, Elizabeth, and Mary of Bethany are all chosen to portray ideals of either motherhood, faith or domesticity, whilst the four predellas tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. These predellas show the skill of the studio in portraying the events in a narrative with telling detail.

Window s9, South Aisle 4.

Most, but not all of St Petroc's plain glazing windows from earlier decades of the nineteenth century were later replaced by full stained glass, and it takes some effort of the imagination to picture what the church must have looked like before the windows that have been described so far were inserted after 1882. Window **s9** gives us that image, entirely glazed with cathedral tinted glass which gives a hint of colour to the church's interior, but with absolutely no visual imagery or ornamentation. Such windows were undoubtedly cheap, they stopped the draughts, and were almost certainly the product of a local manufacturer incurring minimal transportation costs.

Window s10, South Aisle 5, 1877

This was inserted in 1877, probably replacing a cathedral tinted earlier window. It is a memorial window given by the parents to six children of William Henry and Sarah Ann Parkyn.¹⁴ The individual dedicatees are not named, and all the details are symbolic or decorative. The tracery contains the sacred monograph 'ihs' flanked by alpha and omega. The repetition of central diamonds in the main lights is rendered less monotonous by the varied motives and colouring in the background quarries and borders. It probably served as a model for the design of windows **s4 and n9**, that were inserted five years later.

Window s11, South Aisle West.

See the comments on window **s9**, but with one important detailed change. It will be obvious that the uniformity of the cathedral tinted glass is somewhat relieved here by the insertion of a row of 'bull's eyes', the central remainder of a disc of crown glass. Today these are regarded as quaintly Dickensian, but in the nineteenth century were either discarded or as in this case used to decorative effect.

Window W1. West, 1868

This window has several points of interest. It was inserted in 1868¹⁵ after the organ had been moved. It was dedicated to Revd. John Wallis who was vicar of Bodmin for 49 years from 1817. The main subjects are the four evangelists on either side of the figure of Christ, with the sacred symbols of 'ihs' and 'alpha/omega' in the tracery. What is most striking of this window is the richness and depth of the colours, in marked contrast to the more subdued palette of windows that were inserted only a decade later. This pattern of colouring was common in the products from the London studio of Heaton, Butler & Bayne in this decade, although there is no documentary evidence to support the claim that they were the designers and manufacturers of the window.

Window n11, North Aisle West and Window n10, North Aisle 5

See the comments on window **s9**, South Aisle 4

Window n9, North Aisle 4

See the comments on the decorative panel window **s4**, South Chapel south 2. The inscription indicates an 1865 date of death for the dedicatee Robert Flamank, but the rest is illegible. Like the other three windows in this format, it was installed at the 1884 restoration. The tracery does contain the initials 'RF'.

Window n8, North Aisle 3

The D.C.L.I. memorial window for the Great War was not made by Clayton & Bell but by Hubert Blanchford of Exeter and installed in 1923.¹⁶ The tracery contains the regiment armorial with two angels holding the county armorial. The originality of the window lies in the image of the soldier: the only windows in Cornwall that portray an ordinary soldier of the Great War are in this 1914-18 regimental window at Bodmin and the war memorial window at Lelant. The wounded Tommy with his rifle kneels at the foot of the Cross, which is flanked by images of Saints Guron and Denis, with his martyred head. The predellas below show the main religious buildings in four areas of battle associated with the regiment – Ypres, Merville, Arras and Albert. Again, it is telling that the scenes emphasise the devastation of war and the destruction of major churches. Note that now the unnamed officers, N.C.O.'s and men are collectively included, in contrast to the dedication of window **s7**.

Window n7, North Aisle 2

This is the last of the Clayton & Bell war memorial windows, commemorating the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry's South Africa Campaign 1899–1902. It was inserted in 1903 and

unveiled by the Earl of Mount Edgcumbe standing in for the Prince of Wales who was unable to attend.¹⁷ This regimental memorial window is the most ambiguous of all war memorial windows in Cornwall. The main lights show saints Martin, Maurice, Gerron and Longinus. All were soldiers, and the central two, in renouncing warfare, became martyrs for their faith. Both Martin and Longinus turned to peace when they accepted the Christian message. This message of peace is in complete contrast to the lower panels which depict the most graphic portrayals of an act of war in Cornish stained glass. A cavalry battalion, supported by infantry, is shown overwhelming a defeated and retreating army: a very graphic imperialistic image, and one that mirrors the culture of the Edwardian Age of Empire. It is difficult to reconcile this with the pacifist sentiments in the main section of the window, but it is one of the most dynamic memorial windows in Cornwall.

Window n6, North Aisle 1

See comments on window **s4**, South Chapel south 3. Like the other two decorative panel windows (**s4 and n9**) with the same format, it was inserted during the 1884 restoration. The initials WHL refer to the dedicatee Captain William Henry Liddell, RN, former commander of HMS Tamar, died 7th June 1880. The Western Morning News December 24, 1884, p. 6 states "The windows were all glazed and painted by Messrs. Bell and Co., the well-known London firm", indicating that Clayton & Bell might well have been responsible for them as well as the full stained glass windows.

Window n5, North Chapel North 3 and Window n4, North Chapel North 2

These two windows are in plain glass with the leads forming a six-pointed star motif. It is believed that these were glazed by George Snell of Cober Valley Studio in 2001 to replace earlier windows that had suffered vandal damage.¹⁸ There is no record of what the earlier window was. The "star" is more a Seal of Solomon than a Star of David; each panel contains two triangles; one red, one blue, and the intersections alternate red-over-blue and blue-over-red, which suggests a three-dimensional structure of two (differently coloured) interlocked triangles, rather than a strictly two-dimensional (and singly coloured) Star of David. Although the window **n4** is directly above the Normandy Veterans' plaque the window motif does not seem to have any connection with the normal representations of the five-pointed Normandy Star.

Window n3, North Chapel North 1

This is the earliest surviving stained glass window in St Petroc's church, and dates from 1859.¹⁹ Its style is very typical of the early Gothic Revival with single figures, very elongated, in bright primary colours. The allegorical figures of Faith and Hope with the figure of Christ as Love were very popular at that time. The window was donated by the five surviving children, 'in grateful memory of their beloved parents, John P. Watkin, who died May 7th, 1846, aged 68, and Loveday Watkin, who died September 17th, 1857, aged 78, A.D. 1859.' Cornish windows of the 1850s are rare, and this is a valuable survival of a period when

stained glass, heavily under the influence of Pugin, used medieval windows as their main inspiration.

Window n2, North Chapel East, 1936

The final window in this sequence is also the most recent. It is a late First World War window made by the studio of A.K. Nicholson and was inserted in 1936.²⁰ It forms a fitting climax to the series of memorial windows dedicated to the fallen in warfare. The tracery shows the crucifixion with Mary and John. It will be noticed that the cross forms not a tree of death but of life, the leaves growing for the "Healing of Nations." On the other parts of the tracery are the emblems of the Passion. The main lights are images are from the legends of Arthur and Percival with the English Christian kings Richard 1 and Edward 1. Thus, the chivalric sacrifice from the legends of the Round Table and medieval times is linked to the theme of just wars.

The figures of the two dedicatees are shown kneeling at prayer desks at the foot of the window. The first is Major General Sir John Eardley Wilmot Inglis, KCB, colonel of the 32th Regiment of Foot, died 27th September 1862, aged 47, at Homburg, Germany. He was the colonel of the 32nd regiment who commanded the garrison at the siege of Lucknow in the year of the Indian Mutiny, 1857. The other dedicatee is Captain Percy Ashton M.C. who served with the 1st and 8th Battalions of the D.C.L.I. in France and Salonika 1914-18. The inscription also highlights the suffering that results from all wars: 'and who died from the effects of War Service, 1934' (sixteen years after the end of hostilities!): 'A man courageous, courteous, kind, Through suffering of steadfast mind.'

In both its powerful and resonant iconography and the skill of its execution, this window is one of the most significant in the church.

Conclusions

Three main conclusions can be drawn from this examination of all the windows at St Petroc's. The first is a cultural theme that is present in most parish churches who possess a collection of Victorian stained glass windows. The final decades of the nineteenth century have been termed 'an Age of Doubt' and often windows were inserted to reaffirm the basic tenets of the Christian faith in the face of the challenges of science, nonconformity, and atheism. St Petroc's windows lacked a definite scheme: the subject and position of the windows, inserted over several decades with more than one restoration, were chosen by the donors. The two cardinal windows, east and west, fall into this category of Faith, and as we have seen they are windows of iconographical and artistic significance.

The second conclusion concerns patronage and the dedicatees of these memorial windows. Some contain references to the professions and allegiances of the dedicatees. Stained glass was and still is an expensive artistic medium, and it was inevitable that patronage was drawn from the 'great and the good' in Victorian society, and that most of the dedicatees were male. The two windows that are directly to female dedicatees contain either female saints or allegorical figures representing the Christian virtues and their biblical precedents.

The virtues such as Purity and Fortitude are added to the more usual Faith, Hope and Charity, and therefore identified as feminine virtues. Thus, they contrast with the masculine figures and virtues that dominate the war memorial windows. This stark contrast is a feature of many churches, but it is more obvious at St Petroc's because of the number of war memorial windows. There is therefore a major statement here of Victorian gender culture and attitudes.

It follows therefore as the third conclusion that this domination of war memorial windows is St Petroc's main claim to significance. Not only do these windows span a record of conflicts from 1857 to 1918, but they also show a progressive change in iconography, and so provide a context to set the individual war memorial windows in fifty other Cornish churches.²¹ From the start the windows integrate the Cornish saints into the biblical figures and memorial narratives. The Cornish saints were to become one of the main features of stained glass windows in Cornish churches during the twentieth and twenty first centuries. The identification of individual officers is rapidly superseded by a more general acknowledgement of all ranks²² in the windows leading up to the First World War, where it is the ordinary soldier who is the only one portrayed. More subtly the effects of conflict and the sacrifices made become integrated into iconography and inscriptions. There is never any suggestion that the conflict being commemorated was any less than a Just War, but progressively more prominence is given to those who chose an alternative of peace. In many respects these changes in the war memorial iconography reflect the changes in public attitudes to the Empire wars of the Victorian and Edwardian periods and the cataclysmic effects of the First World War.

¹ Truro Diocesan Kalendar (TDK) 1899 : 162 – Inserted 10th, February, 1898. Royal Cornwall Gazette October 6, 1898 p 2.

² Clayton and Bell also installed similar large Te Deum windows at Liskeard and Lostwithiel.

³ Royal Cornwall Gazette (RCG) 5th January, 1824. Manufacturer and subject-Polsue *Parochial History of Cornwall* (Vol. 1) 1867 : 88

⁴ This trend was already evident in John Hedgeland's windows of the late 1820's at St Neot.

⁵ www.cornishstainedglass.org.uk/mgsfw/ article by Michael Swift 'Stained glass windows in Cornwall by the Plymouth firm of Fouracre'.

⁶ Light 1) Fortitude above Esther: (Predella below) Esther before the King.

Light 2) Patience above Anna: (Predella below) Presentation in the Temple.

Light 3) Faith above Elizabeth: (Predella below) Ann and Blessed Virgin Mary.

Light 4) Hope above Syrophenician woman: (Predella below) Woman beseeching Christ to cast out devil.

Light 5) Charity above Dorcas: (Predella below) Comforting the sick.

Light 6) Purity above Blessed Virgin Mary: (Predella below) Annunciation to the BVM.

⁷ Inscription 'Loving Memory of John Pomeroy Gilbert 2nd son of the Revd Walter Raleigh Gilbert Born July 6, 1890, Died July 8 1898'.

⁸ Royal Cornwall Gazette December 26, 1884, p 4.

⁹ Royal Cornwall Gazette September 24th, 1880 report of the prominent Masonic presence at the funeral service.

¹⁰ Royal Cornwall Gazette October 23, 1869, p 5

¹¹ It is suggested in Pat Munn *St Petroc's Windows*, 2002, leaflet, p.2 that the cause might be 'a paint bleaching substance emitted by outside trees' but a more plausible explanation is the addition of borax to the glass painting and inadequate firing.

¹² Royal Cornwall Gazette January 8, 1891, p 4.

-
- ¹³ Western Morning News April 25, 1892, p 5.
- ¹⁴ Window inscription "To the glory of God and in memory of six beloved children of William Henry and Sarah Ann Parkyn entered into rest. Erected AD 1877".
- ¹⁵ Royal Cornwall Gazette August 15, 1867, p 6.
- ¹⁶ Western Morning News June 18, 1923, p 3.
- ¹⁷ Cornish Guardian July 24, 1903, p 3.
- ¹⁸ Pat Munn, p.3-4. In addition to n4 and n5, the other windows that suffered vandal damage in these years were n6, n3, e, s6 and n8.
- ¹⁹ Launceston Weekly News December 24, 1859, p 4.
- ²⁰ Cornish Guardian July 23, 1936, p 13.
- ²¹ Michael G. Swift www.cornishstainedglass.org.uk/mgsppm/ 'War memorials '.
- ²² The large memorial beneath window n7 in the North Aisle lists all ranks that lost their lives in the Egyptian and South African wars.