

# ST MICHAEL AND ST MARY MAGDALENE, EASTHAMPSTEAD. NOTES ON THE STAINED GLASS.

## THE WINDOWS BEFORE SIR EDWARD BURNE-JONES.

The present Parish Church is the second known to have stood on this site. The body of the Church was rebuilt from 1865 to 1867 but the Tower base was retained from the earlier Church. The Tower was heightened and probably completed by 1873. The architect was John W. Hugall.

Today the Parish Church is glazed throughout with 19<sup>th</sup> century stained glass. It is internationally famous for its five stained glass windows by Sir Edward Burne-Jones. However when the Parish Church reopened in 1867 it had few of the quality furnishings seen today and none of the impressive stained glass. Stained glass windows have always been expensive. They are usually commissioned and donated as private memorials. The earliest windows went in within two years of the nave being completed. The most renowned, the Last Judgement in the east window, didn't go in until 1876, ten years after the body of the Parish Church was completed.

The first known photograph of the interior of the new Church is that of the famous Victorian photographer Francis Frith. His photograph dates from 1900. By then all familiar windows and furnishing had been installed. A framed copy of the photograph has been donated and hangs in the Annexe. It raises the question of what glass filled the windows before the stained glass went in?

Hugall's drawings for the Parish Church had survived. They are part of the Library of the Royal Institute of British Architects and are housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum. There are eleven drawings in all. Six are entitled "The Church of St Michael, Easthampstead, Berks" and dated April 1865. Four are entitled "The Church of St Mary and St Michael, Easthampstead, Berks." but are not dated. There is also one drawing entitled "A proposal for the rebuilding of the Tower" dated September 1873. All eleven drawings are tinted with watercolour. Some have comments written by Hugall himself. One of these eleven drawings in the RIBA allows us to imagine what the windows in newly opened Church looked like.

On an undated cross section of the new Church, looking south, Hugall has personally annotated the detail as follows:

*"The windows in the chancel and baptistery are glazed in plain glass in the hope that stained glass may be inserted."*

Hugall was partly right in his assumptions that the baptistery and chancel windows would be the first to be filled. The baptistery window is probably one of the two earliest stained glass windows in the Church. The earliest dateable glass is the *Talitha Cumi* window at the west end of the north aisle. This is in memory of Georgina Samuel who died aged 17 in 1867. It is by William Wailes who also made the stained glass in the cross-shaped window in the Baptistery which was glazed in 1873.

The east window remained glazed in plain glass until 1876. The reason for this was probably financial. The east window is the largest expanse of glass in the church and therefore the most expensive to glaze in stained glass. It was finally glazed with stained glass by Morris and Company in 1876. This was as a result of a personal tragedy for the Downshire family. The fifth Marquis of Downshire died aged 29 in 1874. His wife Georgina gave the stained glass in the east window in his memory. It may have been an obvious choice for a memorial as there was a precedent. The in 1868 Downshire family had given the stained glass in the large window in the Downshire Chapel, also by William Wailes, in memory of the fifth Marquis' father.

Hugall's annotation continues:

*"The rest are filling with rough plate in horizontal sheets on which are permanently drawn in outline foliage of the vine, fig, passion flower, wheat, shamrock in the Downshire Aisle."*

What did this rough plate glass with outline foliage look like? In the Sacristy there is a small window. The window had been badly vandalised in the past and glazed with opaque amber glass. In the arched top of the window older glass survived. This was opaque white glass, rough in texture, with the black outline of a plant with berries. It is now clear that this small fragment was all that was left of Hugall's "*rough plate in horizontal sheets on which are permanently drawn in outline foliage*".

This throws more light on the first two stained glass windows. Both the west window in the north aisle and the cross-shaped window in the baptistery have a background composed of opaque white glass with foliage outlined in black. When William Wailes put in his new stained glass windows, was he trying to make them fit with the rest of the plain glazed windows in the Church?

In 2006 the window in the Sacristy was vandalised again and re-glazed in opaque plain glass to match the 19<sup>th</sup> century fragment at the top. There were plans to reproduce the existing outline foliage on the new plain glass. It was not to be. Within a month the window had been vandalised once more. This time even the 19<sup>th</sup> century glass at the top was smashed beyond repair.

The stained glass artist David Price was contacted. He managed to extrapolate from the fragments a whole new window showing the black outline of a leafy tree fruiting with berries. At that time it was not known that the design was from a fragment of the only surviving example of the original glass. David Price suggested that some colour should be introduced in the design which he did on the stem of the plant and the berries. The cost of the window was borne by the family of Pam Reader who gave it in her memory. It was dedicated at Candlemas in 2007 and a grill put over it to prevent future vandalism. The window is now the only reminder of what the windows looked like before Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

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