



Making the transparent apparent

Reconstructing a feminist history for twentieth century female stained glass artists through case studies of key women

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Abstract

PURPOSE

This research adopts the premise that stained glass made by female artists is rarely identified as such nor celebrated as having been created by a woman. For there to be space for contemporary female stained glass artists a history needs to be established so that women and girls can see their own potential achievable in the reflections of the accomplishments of hitherto unknown, hidden women.

METHODS

Five case studies have been created to investigate the life and work of women stained glass artists of the 20th Century through a feminist lens, presenting women that had successful vocations in stained glass with their work permanently installed in British cathedrals at the pinnacle of their career; namely Mary Lowndes, Joan Howson, Margaret Agnes Rope, Dorothy Marion Grant, Moira Forsyth and a contemporary artist, Helen Whittaker. An investigation has been undertaken into existing directories and repositories for stained glass heritage plus an observation into the narrative presented at the places where their work is situated, to find out how well they are currently represented and celebrated.

RESULTS

The case studies show the difficulties and discrimination these women had to overcome, as well as the connections and similarities between them, their networks and their achievements. The research highlights the need to promote their achievements further, raising their profile and ensuring their names are not excluded from appropriate honour. To ensure these women's names and stories are not hidden and forgotten again, they need to be included within the stained glass canon, promoted in on-line directories and extolled in the places that they are represented.

IMPLICATIONS

By bringing to prominence the visibility of women stained glass artists, both of their successful careers and reputation that women and girls can aspire to, we will help safeguard the future of our stained glass heritage currently under threat. There are wider implications for women in the arts too, in terms of gender inclusiveness in the accepted canons of art and design. By fulfilling this exercise for my discipline, this adds to an ongoing reclaiming and documenting of talented women artists previously omitted, or buried in the various biases of our art histories.

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

SIGNED *Jacqueline Ann Fowler (by email)*

DATE *14 September 2022*

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

SIGNED *Jacqueline Ann Fowler (by email)*

DATE *14 September 2022*

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

SIGNED *Jacqueline Ann Fowler (by email)*

DATE *14 September 2022*

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Excel spreadsheet being used to collate data research on female stained glass artists available here: [Female S-G Artists 1914-1975.xls](#)

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APPENDIX B

Transcript of a letter from Reverend Eric Milner-White to Reverend Spencer Carpenter dated 29 March 1950 about Dorothy Marion Grant available here: [Link to letter](#)

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Transcript of a letter from Reverend Eric Milner-White to Reverend Spencer Carpenter dated 28 February 1950 about Michael Bell available here: [Link to letter](#)

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Proposed directory and map: Visit Stained Glass by Women that can be found online here: <https://jacquifowler.wordpress.com/research>

APPENDIX E

Auto-ethnographical blog: Fifty two blog posts that show the thought processes from July 2021 to August 2022, including the practical making, personal exhibition, research visits and sublime revelations that led to the writing of this 15,000 word thesis. *Memories, musings and motivations* can be found online here: <https://jacquifowler.blogspot.com/?zx=afa0fa1e3c93dba0>

List of Abbreviations

BSMGP	British Society of Master Glass Painters
c.	circa (approximately)
ed.	editor
et al.	et alia (and others)
i.e.	that is
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
p.	page
pp.	pages
RCA	Royal College of Art
SGR	Stained Glass Repository
St.	Saint
V&A	Victoria and Albert Museum

RESEARCH QUESTION:

To find and record examples of stained glass created by women artists, in particular the known glass artists, Mary Lowndes, Joan Howson, Dorothy Marion Grant, Margaret Aldrich Rope and Moira Forsyth, and to consider whether their work is celebrated.

Preface

Female stained glass artists are largely absent from the discourse of contemporary culture within the UK (Gray, 2019, p. 14). This research aims to rediscover their work. Martin Crampin, in his survey of stained glass in the churches of Wales suggests “the neglect of stained glass by historians of visual culture has been a failure to understand its impact on congregations and communities and to ignore its ubiquity right across urban and rural Wales” (2014, pp. 6-7). This applies not only to Wales, but throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. This research proposes to correct some of this imbalance by investigating the work of female stained glass artists of the 20th Century, with the aim of publishing findings into a previously under-reported genre.

This research is important, especially as a female stained glass artist, because, as Griselda Pollock, quoting Linda Nochlin, asked, “how can women know themselves in a country where they have no language, if there are no representations or spaces of the feminine?” (Pollock, 2007, p. 13). The case studies chosen for this piece of work are, in the main, about women who have had their stained glass work installed in British cathedrals - their most prestigious and perhaps most challenging of commissions.

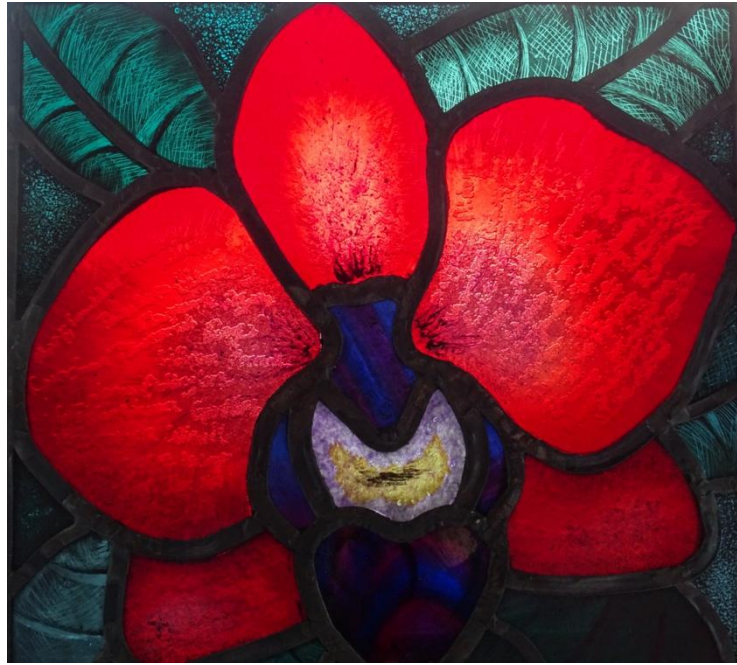


Figure 1: Hidden, Forgotten, Invisible

Background

Although specialist books and articles have been written on 20th Century stained glass explaining how design and style evolved and about the great men who made it happen (Cormack, 2015; Crampin, 2014; Broady, Adams and Broady, 2010) very little has been recorded about the female stained glass artists of the early 20th Century (Gray, 2019).

This research adopts the premise that stained glass made by female artists is rarely identified as such nor celebrated as having been created by a woman (Cormack, 1985, pp. 2-3). For there to be space for contemporary female stained glass artists, we need to establish a history. To be aware of the context of the stained glass, of its authenticity, its creation out of devotion and its “difference” (Pollock, 2007, p. 14) means that women and girls can see their own potential, their dreams and ambitions, achievable in the reflections of the accomplishments of hitherto unknown, hidden women (Fowler, 2020).

Zoe Thomas (2020), in her recent publication *Women Art Workers and the Arts and Crafts Movement*, vocalises some of the frustrations experienced in this research too, such as access to records and artefacts:

More generally, the work of women artists in public galleries and museums constituted less than 10 percent of collection material in twentieth-century Britain. The works of the women who feature in these pages have often been lost, are behind closed doors in private households, or are inaccessible at museums and galleries, institutions which face considerable funding cuts and often prioritise artworks by men, widely believed to be worth more money and to attract larger crowds (THOMAS, 2020, p. 19).

Even viewing of architectural glass, installed in places of worship, can be frustrated by limited opening hours, Covid restrictions, private access such as in a vestry, deconsecration and closure, not to mention hidden in plain sight – those windows created by women and no-one even knows! There have been several occasions when, visiting a church to find a hidden gem, the warden would insist: “no, there is no glass here by women, let me show you some by great men”. Liverpool Anglican Cathedral were oblivious of the work on the Great West Window that Caroline Benyon completed on behalf of her ailing father Carl Edwards dedicated in 1979; Winchester Cathedral were unaware of the work Veronica Whall undertook with her father Christopher Whall on the Baldwin Window installed in 1923; and St Oswald Parish Church in Oswestry overlooked the Millenium Window designed and installed by Jane Gray, a former assistant of Lawrence Lee of Coventry Cathedral fame.

Considerable research on the question of hidden and forgotten female stained glass artists was undertaken in 2020 as a precursor to this current research. The material for that inquiry was gleaned in the main from journal publications of the British Society of Master Glass Painters (BSMGP) from 1924 to 1975. It is to be noted that the BSMGP is London based and so the data that was uncovered is biased towards the south of England. That initial research found the names of over 120 female stained glass artists, both designers and makers, along with biographical information where available (Fowler, 2020). The list is by no means exhaustive but formed a good start for this further inquiry (see Appendix A for more information).

Research into five women, chosen out of those 120 found names, has enabled case studies to be generated, bringing to light their life stories, achievements, specific installations and some of the difficulties they had to overcome to thrive in the patriarchal environment that was, and to some extent still is, a man's world.

What difficulties have women encountered and how did they overcome discrimination, denigration, devaluation, dismissal, in attempting to be an artist in a society which since the Book of Genesis has associated the divine right of creativity with men alone?

(PARKER AND POLLOCK, 1981, p. 1).

The women chosen for these case studies are particularly important figures in stained glass social history, as they have had work installed in British cathedrals - their most prestigious and perhaps most challenging of commissions.

Chapter one will reiterate the findings of previous research detailing the achievements of Mary Lowndes (1856-1929), an astute woman whose business acumen created an environment where, in the early 20th Century, women artists could thrive and carve a creative, independent living for themselves (Cormack, 2018, p. 6). The remodelling of the former Jesse Tree window at Salisbury Cathedral is attributed to her (O'Donohue, 2000).

Chapter two will draw upon inspiration from Westminster Abbey in London, a mausoleum to the great and the good. Amongst almost 800 years-worth of stained glass excellence, only one woman, Joan Howson (1885-1964), has had her own artwork installed, an adaptation of the previous Victorian scheme damaged beyond recognition in the London blitz of 1941. In contrast, a 21st Century artist and designer, Helen Whittaker (1974-), has made and installed two schemes within the main Abbey space, although it is not her name on the marketing for ecumenical tourism.

Chapter three will introduce Dorothy Marion Grant (1912-1988), a highly respected stained glass artist who designed an epic scheme for Exeter Cathedral's Lady Chapel, twice, because the first design did not emulate the desired patriarchal tone for a traditional Lady Chapel. The written language used by an imperious figure, who was merely asked for his opinion, is denigrating indeed.

Chapter four will discuss the particularities of women's art with the work of Margaret Agnes Rope (1882-1953) as a prime example. Her proficiently executed schemes for Shrewsbury Cathedral and surrounding areas are celebrated indeed, but her most surprising art, installed in a small Catholic church in Wales, comes from a familial place of grief and sorrow.

Chapter five will conclude the set with Moira Forsyth (1905-1991) who has work installed in four different cathedrals, not least Guildford in Surrey, her spiritual home. This inquiry into the fate of stained glass when it is deemed 'under threat' highlights the vulnerability of sacred art to the demands of mammon. It also brings to light a potential gender imbalance when it comes to rescuing stained glass at risk of destruction.

The intention is to discover what these women have in common, the challenges they faced, the barriers they overcame, the accomplishments they excelled in. The conclusion within this author's previous research (Fowler, 2020) pointed out the discrimination that women artists faced as the art world dismissed their practice because they were producing pieces that are 'purely decorative'. It was encouraging to find that things are changing:

The Tate Modern acknowledges that the "boundaries between art and craft became blurred in the twentieth century". Art establishments such as the Bauhaus encouraged artists to investigate using different media in their creations. That pushing of boundaries continues as contemporary artists such as Grayson Perry and Tracey Emin use craft techniques but their status as artists is never brought into question (TATE MODERN, 2019).

At a recent exhibition titled *Young Poland (2021)* at the William Morris Gallery in Walthamstow, there was an admirable quote by Stanislaw Wyspianski, considered the father of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Poland. Printed on an information board:

Wyspianski taught at the Krakow Academy of Fine Arts and was a co-founder of the Polish Applied Arts Society (1901). Like William Morris, he believed there should be no distinction between so-called ‘fine’ and ‘applied’ arts, stating: “I do not understand why I was appointed as Professor of the Decorative Arts since all art is decorative” (WILLIAM MORRIS GALLERY, 2021).



*Figure 2: Apollo: Copernicus's Solar System
by Piotr Ostrowski*



*Figure 3: Detail of Apollo: Copernicus's Solar System
by Piotr Ostrowski*

Despite the liberal thinking of Morris, Wyspianski and the Tate Modern, the *Oxford Dictionary of Art* (2014) still describes the term *fine art* as “the ‘higher’ non-utilitarian arts as opposed to applied or decorative arts” reinforcing the concept of an art hierarchy (Fowler, 2020). However, for the purposes of this writing it has been considered that the description of ‘designer/maker’ is too clinical and scientific for practitioners who draw upon so much spirituality, emotion and virtuosity in their creation of architectural glass.

The philosophy of Keith Barley, proprietor of one of the most highly respected stained glass enterprises in the UK is one with which this author concurs:

Barley Studio were delighted when their Founder, Managing Director and Accredited Conservator Keith Barley was awarded the MBE ‘for service to cultural restoration and conservation’ in the Queen’s Birthday Honours 2015. The honour recognises Keith’s desire to “treat stained glass windows as a work of art rather than merely an object of antiquity”; respecting their imagery, meaning, and above all the intentions of the original artist (BARLEY STUDIO, 2022).

It is intended to test that previous conclusion (Fowler, 2020) through a feminist lens, to see whether disparities on the grounds of status of medium (i.e. glass being regarded as ‘purely decorative’), or the sex of the artist, or any other form of discrimination was at play. At the same time, it is intended to consider the contemporary celebration of the work of these artists. How well are they known, both within their chosen locality and nationally? Is their work cherished? Is it promoted within ecumenical tourism? Is it talked about nationally or internationally? Who holds a flame for their memory and are they appropriately represented in the canon that is stained glass art history?

Mary Lowndes and The Glass House – Sisters, doing it for themselves

The great niece of Mary Elizabeth Lowndes, Ann O'Donohue, gives a very personal account of her aunt's life, work and achievements in her piece for the *Journal of Stained Glass* (2000, pp. 39-52). She tells the story of Lowndes' childhood, how she was the eldest of the eight children of Reverend Canon Richard Lowndes (1821-1901), of St Mary the Virgin Parish Church in Sturminster Newton, Dorset and Annie Harriet Lowndes (née Kaye) (1827-1907) (Ancestry, 2022). Despite being excluded from her brothers' Latin lessons because she was a girl, Lowndes borrowed their books to teach herself. She became proficient in both Latin and Greek, skills that aided her later in designing stained glass, along with a good knowledge of bible stories.



Figure 4: Mary Lowndes



Figure 5: Detail of Resurrection



Figure 6: Detail of Resurrection

At the age of twenty-five Lowndes left the family home to attend the Slade School of Fine Art in London and in her second year she won a prize for “Drawing from Life” (O'Donohue, 2000, p. 40). She was noticed as exceptional and was offered the opportunity to be trained in drawing up cartoons by Henry Holiday (1839-1927), a stained glass tutor regarded as one of the great masters of the Arts and Crafts movement (Cormack, 2015, p. 85) as well as a socialist and supporter of the suffrage movement (Crawford, 2018, p. 122).

O'Donohue (2000, p. 40) recounts that whilst learning under Holliday, Lowndes was given access to draw live models, which is noteworthy because it was almost unheard of in the 1880s for women to be given permission to attend life-drawing classes. Linda Nochlin notes, in her seminal text *Why have there been no great women artists?*, that up to the year 1893 female students were forbidden to take part in life drawing classes at the Royal Academy. Even after that date the models would be “partially draped” (Nochlin, 1989, p. 159).

It is to be reasonably assumed that the preclusion of female students from life classes at the Slade School of Fine Art in the 1880s would have been equally strict. Lowndes seems to have defied convention, once again, to ensure her education was not lacking due to her sex. During her career as a stained glass designer and maker Lowndes produced over 100 installations, not least the rearrangement and reglazing of an ancient window in Salisbury Cathedral following damage in the first world war (O'Donohue, 2000, pp. 49-52).

Lowndes was exceptional at building networks and partnerships. She rented a workshop at Messrs Britten and Gilson's premises in Southwark, where Christopher Whall (1849-1924), considered “the great master” in the Arts and Crafts stained glass movement, had his workshop (Cormack, 2015, p. 85). She taught herself glass painting with guidance from William J Booer (1844-1923), Britten and Gilson's head of the stained glass department, and most significantly she persuaded their glazier, Alfred Drury (1868-1940), to join her in a business partnership. Lowndes & Drury's The Glass House, established in 1897, was “one of the most successful practical initiatives inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement” (Cormack, 2018, p. 7).

The patronage of Whall was instrumental in the success of the venture. He helped to design the premises in Fulham and close links were forged between The Glass House and both The Royal College of Arts and the Central School of Arts and Crafts, where Whall taught his craft. At The Glass House artists could rent fully equipped studios and be assisted by skilled staff to make their own designs into stained glass. The initiative was a fulfilment of Lowndes's own vision, funded almost entirely by herself, her female relatives and circle of friends – as Cormack puts it, “A great feminist enterprise” (Cormack, 2018, p. 6).

Drury ran the practical side of the workshops and Lowndes oversaw business matters, strategic planning and finances (Cormack, 2018, p. 11).

Initially, Lowndes and Drury contributed £30 each of the needed capital of £60, but this was later supplemented by further substantial loans from Lowndes, her partner Barbara Forbes, her aunt Alice Vivian Kaye, and a Miss J. F. Pearson (CORMACK, 2015, p. 96).

Elizabeth Crawford, in her biography of Lowndes as an artist and suffragist notes:

From the 1890s Mary Lowndes was not only a woman pioneer in the field of stained glass painting but facilitated the entry of many other women into the trade, so that by the time of her retirement in the early 1920s there were in London about as many women as men working independently in stained glass (2018, p. 144).

The benefit of this enterprise for female stained glass artists cannot be underestimated. It paved the way for a whole wave of female emancipation, providing a safe, accessible space for respectable middle-class women to work, earn their own living, become independent and help to adorn churches, cathedrals and public buildings with exceptional, arts and crafts inspired stained glass. By the time The Glass House was closed in 1993 the world had changed into a very different landscape for women, thanks to remarkable pioneers like Mary Lowndes (Fowler, 2020).

However, the story does not end there. Lowndes forged another partnership that helped her to be the extraordinary independent woman that she was. Like many female artists of her time, Lowndes had a life-long friend and companion, her sister-in-law Barbara Forbes (1872-1946). An artist and draughtswoman in her own right, with whom Lowndes shared a home (O'Donohue, 2000, pp. 39-40). They were suffragettes together, designing and teaching others how to make noteworthy banners for marches. Some examples of these banners and a book of patterns has been saved for posterity, held in the Women's Library at The London School of Economics and Political Science (Women's Library, 2022). Lowndes and Forbes were founder members of the *Artists Suffrage League*, Lowndes became Chair and Forbes was Secretary in 1907 (Crawford, 2018, p. 144). These two were women who made things happen in the social and political climate of the early 1900s.

The social climate in which they were carving themselves a space to be professional, respected artists could be toxic. The sexist construct was insidious and regularly quoted to belittle and deride (Thomas, 2015). Alongside the perceived low status of stained glass as ‘applied art’ or ‘decorative’ (Fowler, 2020), we are reminded the term ‘amateur’ took on different connotations for the sex binary.

In response to the growth in numbers of women becoming artists, the term ‘amateur’ began to be understood as having disparaging, gendered connotations, persistently associated with women’s pursuits, despite the ‘gentleman amateur’ historically having been a respectable term for learned men. In his 1908 *Craftsmanship in Competitive Industry*, C. R. Ashbee proclaimed that the ‘two forms of competition’ continually ‘strangling the crafts and wasting human life’ were ‘the machine’ but also the ‘lady amateur’ who was ‘perpetually tingling to sell her work before she half knows how to make it’ (THOMAS, 2020, pp. 5-6).

Thomas eloquently describes the environment in which women struggled to ‘construct their own artistic identity’:

Work by women was not seen as having an intrinsic authenticity which, it was felt, best arose out of an exchange between those working-class male makers and the guiding intellect of visionary middle-class designers. Ashbee’s own company ultimately failed financially and had to be closed – in noticeable contrast to the commercial successes of many of the women’s businesses (THOMAS, 2020, p. 11) .

In this environment, with these circulating opinions, Lowndes and Forbes became founding members of the Women’s Guild of Arts set up in 1907 by May Morris (1862-1938), daughter of William Morris (1834-1896), author, designer and artist, one of the founder members of the British Arts and Crafts Movement. May Morris considered it necessary to set up such an agency because women were denied membership of the Art Workers Guild.

The creation of the Women's Guild of Arts gave women artists access to professional development through a network of like minded peers and the collective voice they needed to hold their own in a sexist and misogynistic critical art community. Ironically some of their meetings were held in the same premises as the Art Workers' Guild (see Figure 7). The Guild continued until 1940, although women were not welcomed into the Art Workers' Guild until 1964 (Thomas, 2015).

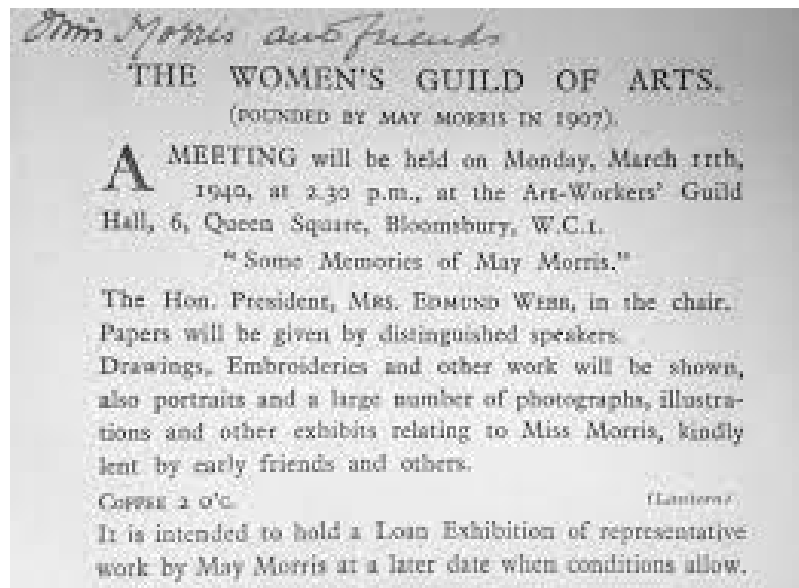


Figure 7: Advert for the Women's Guild of Arts meeting

Thomas (2020, p. 18) writes specifically about Mary Lowndes, highlighting Lowndes longing for equality of the sexes, not just as a suffragist and a woman's right to vote, but in society and in life:

Lowndes wrote in dismay for the Common Cause in 1914 about how 'women have not shared with men in any sort of equality' because 'Women are not free – they have never been free.' Seeking to rally her fellow campaigners, she emphatically stressed this was now 'the age of woman', the moment when women – and women artists in particular – would 'lead a world-wide revolt against the prejudice and ancient tyranny that ... struggle ever to keep woman the inferior creature they proclaim her'.

There is no doubt that Lowndes was at the forefront of the first British women's movement. She had a voice and was not afraid to use it.

She went on to assert optimistically that she and her artistic peers – using several Women's Guild of Arts members as examples – were finally starting to carve out a 'sort of progress towards equality with the sex that has hitherto monopolised to so great an extent the intellectual opportunities of life' (THOMAS, 2020, p. 18).

One can only speculate how she would consider the progress towards equality that women enjoy today, or should that be slow progress, particularly in the art world?

In 2017 Historic England had a special celebration of its Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) spaces, one of which was the Chapel of St Anne, in Saunton, Devon, that Lowndes had furnished with a beautiful window. An interesting take on celebration of an artist, celebrating her perceived sexuality rather than her art, but celebration nonetheless (Fowler, 2020).

In 2018 a statue of Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett (1847-1929) was erected in Parliament Square created by the artist Gillian Wearing to celebrate her great achievements as leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. Around the plinth are photographs of many other notable female activists who made significant contributions to the suffrage campaign, not least Mary Lowndes.



Figure 8: Statue of Millicent Garrett Fawcett



Figure 9: Detail of photographs on the plinth showing other notable campaigners of the suffrage movement, including Mary Lowndes

It is gratifying to see Lowndes represented on such an important sculpture, in a space that represents British culture and values, alongside statues of great men, such as Mahatma Ghandi (1869-1948) campaigner for India's independence from British rule and Nelson Mandela (1918-2013) anti-apartheid activist and president of South Africa from 1994-1999.

In a world with some social justice it would be good to see a blue plaque dedicated to Mary Lowndes at the site where The Glass House used to be, now an architects' business. Only a matter of time, one hopes.



Figure 10: Plaque on The Glass House, Fulham

The name of Mary Lowndes should be so much better known in the history of women's emancipation. The writing of Thomas (2020) about *Women Workers of the Arts and Crafts Movement* goes a long way to putting that right. But the words of Cormack are most apt to finish this case study of Mary Lowndes:

That such extraordinary progress had been made was very largely due to Lowndes herself. She had worked with skill and determination to overcome obstacles and conventional prejudices and to create splendid new opportunities for women in stained glass. Indeed the Glass House truly became the embodiment of her ambition and dedication. In many respects, British glass-painters of today owe much to Mary Lowndes
(2018, p. 12).

Joan Howson and Helen Whittaker at Westminster Abbey – What's in a name?

A recent visit to Westminster Abbey brought to mind the strong connection between an individual's name, their story, recorded history and contemporary culture. For instance, the gravestone of Charles Darwin in the Scientists' Section is a trigger point of what is known of him, his life story, his research, adventures and his radical theories published in *The Origin of Species*. From those immediate recollections one is reminded of the effect of his work on the society of the day, belief systems and a sea change of storytelling from creation to evolution, theology to philosophy, faith to scholarship. All this in association with a name on a gravestone.

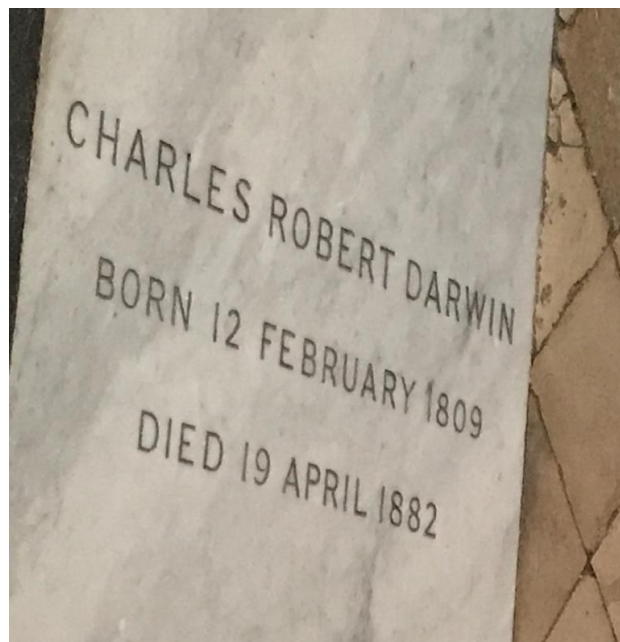


*Figure 11: Memorial plaque for Charles Darwin
in Westminster Abbey*

As can be seen from Figure 11, there are no clues on the cenotaph to tell the story of the deceased, apart from the name and date. This particular name, however, is linked to a story so well known that it is unlikely to be forgotten.

Figures 12-14 are photographs of other memorials of people whose names and stories are well known and not likely to be forgotten, tales of the great and the good, who are deemed worthy to have their names immortalised in such a prestigious place as Westminster Abbey.



Figure 12: Memorial plaque for Roger Bannister

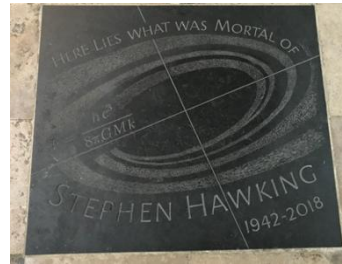


Figure 13: Memorial plaque for Stephen Hawking



Figure 14: Memorial plaque for Octavia Hill

Within a few metres of the plaques to these great people was another inscription in the floor of Westminster Abbey commemorating the death of Miss C. E. Fleming in 1767 (see Figure 15). There are no more clues as to who she was or why her name has been inscribed within the fabric of Westminster Abbey. Initial research, during a time of limited access to resources, in lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic, has brought nothing to light until such time as archives are opened up again. However, with a name and a date of death there is at least somewhere to start that research. The Abbey archives, registers of births, marriages and deaths, local history societies to name a few.



Figure 15: Memorial to Miss C E Fleming (1767)

Without a name, or date, or story it is much harder to start that research. A final resting place for The Unknown Warrior holds pride of place in Westminster Abbey (see Figure 16), with the inscription: "To the glory of God and in perpetual memory of all who gave their lives fighting by land and sea and air for their King, for Great Britain and Ireland and for the Dominions beyond the seas" (Westminster Abbey, 2021), a prime example of when the story holds the main focus, in this instance bringing glory to the tragedy of war.

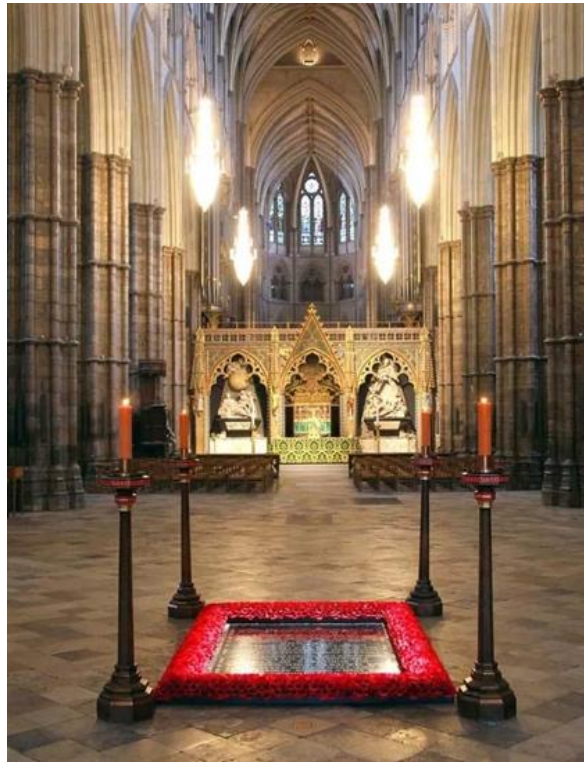


*Figure 16: Grave of the Unknown Warrior
at Remembrance Tide*

When it comes to research, records of names, dates and events are vitally important, to state the obvious. Searching for the contribution of women in the stained glass at Westminster Abbey is only possible when their contribution has been recorded appropriately. As previously stated, the contribution of women has regularly been overlooked, disregarded and under-reported. So, it is good to find that the Abbey's tourist information booklet on stained glass, listing 40 notable schemes with names of designers where known, from 1245 to 2002 (Reynolds, 2002), records the name of Joan Howson as restorer and designer of the considerable scheme in The Chapter House and the only woman's name in the booklet.

The Chapter House at Westminster Abbey was rebuilt in the mid 1200s for both secular and religious use by Henry III (English Heritage, 2002). Its information board tells the story of the destruction of The Chapter House stained glass in the London blitz of 1941 and states:

After the second world war the windows were replaced by Joan Howson. She reused as much of the Victorian glass as she could and added new glass where this was impossible. The new panels include the coats of arms of people associated with the Chapter House from the 13th to the 19th Centuries. The south-west window contains tiny images relating to the Second World War

(INFORMATION BOARD AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY, 2021).

The stained glass restoration work in The Chapter House that Howson completed in 1950, with the assistance of her friend Mary Eily de Putron (1914-1982), was extensive (de Putron, 1977) and no doubt her most prestigious piece of work. But there is so much more to tell of the story of Joan Howson.



Figure 17: Miss Joan Howson



Figure 18: Detail of Chapter House Windows



*Figure 19: Detail of WWII scenes in
The Chapter House*

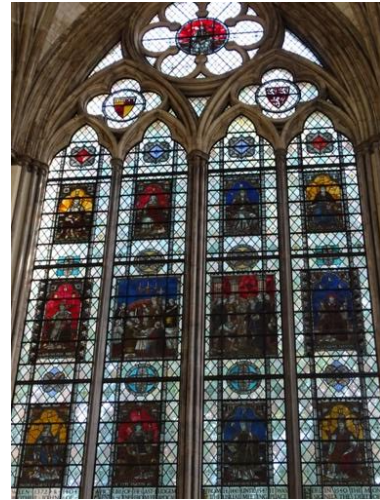


Figure 20: Chapter House Windows

Howson was born in Overton-on-Dee, Flintshire, in 1885, the only daughter of Reverend George John Howson (1854-1943), Archdeacon and Canon Emeritus of Liverpool and Ethel Howson (née Dealtry) (1861-1937). She had three brothers, Roger Saul Howson (1882-1962), Geoffrey Howson (1883-1961) and George Arthur Howson (1886-1936) (Ancestry, 2022). According to her obituary (Rope, 1965) as a young girl Howson was headstrong and resented any inequality with her brothers because of her sex. Coming from a very religious family she was brought up to be mindful of those less fortunate than herself and to help with care for the elderly within the parish.



Figure 21: Detail of Chapter House Windows

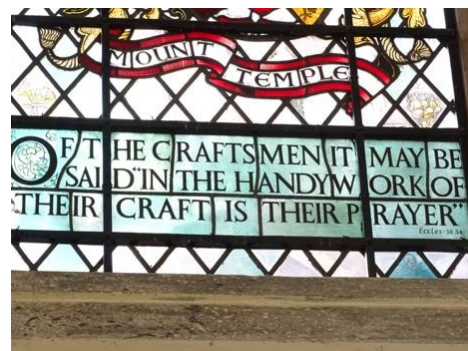


Figure 22: Detail of Chapter House Windows

Initially Howson became a student of music in Paris and Munich, with the ambition to become a professional violinist. Her training was cut short, however, when her mother became gravely ill and she returned to her father's household to help with running the parish in Woolton, Liverpool (de Putron, 1977). Whilst there she was able to attend the Liverpool School of Art where her lifelong passion for designing, making and restoring stained glass began (Rope, 1965).

In 1913, upon completion of her studies her uncle, Reverend James Francis Howson (1857-1934), Rector of Guiseley, Yorkshire, recommended her to well-regarded stained glass artist Archibald Nicholson (1871-1937) who had a highly successful business in Hampstead. Roles in the stained glass world were very hard to come by, particularly for women, but her delight soon turned to disappointment when the men in the workshop flatly refused to work with her. Their excuse was that there was only one toilet (de Putron, 1977). This was the first recorded incident of discrimination due to her gender, however having grown up with three brothers this instance would also prove to strengthen her resilience.

Following this disappointment Howson was introduced by a mutual friend to a fellow glass artist, Caroline Townshend (1878-1944). Townshend was a respected, experienced artist with her own studio on the first floor of The Glass House in Fulham. Townshend was reluctant at first to take on an apprentice because of her social status, being a member of the Fabian Society, and political views as an active suffragist. However, Townshend conceded and took Howson under her wing, ultimately forming a productive and mutually beneficial lifelong partnership. Their workshop produced a prolific body of award-winning designs and installations between the two world wars (de Putron, 1977; Rope, 1965; Gray, 2019).

During the Second World War Howson, Townshend and their good friend and colleague Margaret (Tor) Rope (1891-1988) organised several safe homes in north Wales and cared for evacuee children from Liverpool and London. It was there, following a short battle with cancer that Townshend died in 1944.

It took great courage and strength to build up a stained glass business again at their purpose-built studios in the fashionable, artists' village of Deodar Road in Putney following the Second World War. Howson and her team were particularly well-regarded for their ability to restore war damaged stained glass to its former glory.

An affirmation of how well both Townshend and Howson were regarded was printed in the 1951 volume of the *Journal of Stained Glass* in a piece describing artists' signatures:

Ornithology has not proved very attractive to designers and apart from the bird used by Reginald Bell, the only other examples appear to be the "seagull in flight" which (some years ago) the Misses Townshend and Howson, of London, gave us as their signature and the peacock of Miss Salusbury... But although Miss Townshend is no longer with us, we have constant reminders in the daily press that Miss Howson is still doing first-class repair work in college and cathedral. May her skilful hands be long spared for this type of commission, which requires both patience and understanding beyond the ordinary (KIRBY, 1951).



Figure 23: Example of a joint signature of Townshend and Howson

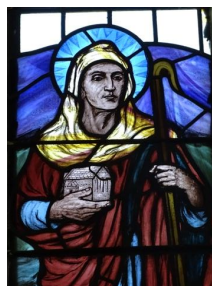


Figure 24: Detail of East Window of St Teilo's Church, Pontarddulais, Swansea



Figure 25: Detail of East Window of St Teilo's Church, Pontarddulais, Swansea

Restoration work of particular note included the Ante Chapel at New College, Oxford; a window in the south aisle of York Minster; and the Chancel of Westminster Abbey. New work included three windows above the altar of the Savoy Chapel for the royal family and the East Window of St Teilo's Church in Pontarddulais, Swansea (Figures 24-25). Each new or restored installation bore the signature of both Townshend and Howson, a gull in flight (Figure 23) until Howson retired in 1963 (de Putron, 1977).

The *England and Wales National Probate Calendar* (Index of Wills and Administrations, 1965) records that Joan Howson, of The Studio, Morfa Bychan, Caernarvonshire, died of cancer in 1964, twenty years to the day after her beloved partner (de Putron, 1977) and left her estate of £42,923 to Rose Annie Edwards (Ancestry, 2022).

“In all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (The Holy Bible: Romans. 8:28). Those familiar with this Biblical quote will recognise how apt its sentiments are for Howson. The irony has not passed us by, that if Howson had been permitted to take up employment with A.K. Nicholson Stained Glass Studios, her designs, her handiwork and her genius would have been subsumed into the A.K. Nicholson brand, her potential may well not have been realised and the considerable contribution she made to our stained glass heritage would never have taken place.

The only other woman, as far as we know, to have made an impact on the stained glass portfolio of Westminster Abbey is contemporary artist Helen Whittaker, Creative Director of Barley Studios in York, a Fellow of the British Society of Master Glass Painters and a member of the Court of Assistants of the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass (see Figure 26).



Figure 26: Helen Whittaker with a piece of her own design for St Joseph's Catholic Church, Tadcaster

A successful artist in her own right, Whittaker has assisted two artists, Hughie O'Donohue (*Marian Windows*) in 2013 and David Hockney (*The Queen's Window*) in 2018, to realise their art in the medium of stained glass. Art, meticulously fabricated to the finest materiality and installed in perpetuity to these halls of grandeur, burial place of kings and historic monument of ages. Figures 27-29 show the two schemes in question.



Figure 27: Marian Windows in the Lady Chapel, Westminster Abbey

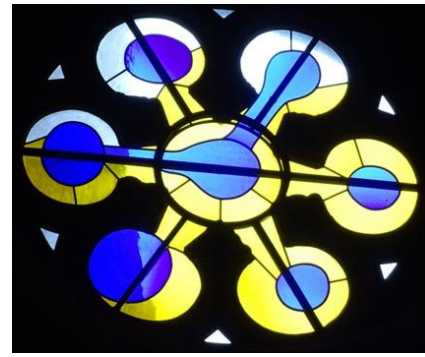


Figure 28: Tracery of the Queen's Window, Westminster Abbey



Figure 29: The Queen's Window, Westminster Abbey



Figure 30: London bus showing advert for The Queen's Window

The windows of these great male artists are certainly celebrated as contemporary works of art (see Figure 30) and the creative skill of Whittaker, under the umbrella of Barley Studios of York, is extolled by proxy (Jenkins, 2020).

There is a widely debated argument to support the theory that male artists are more celebrated, sought after and commissioned than women artists and the example of the career of Helen Whittaker potentially corroborates that perception.

Furthermore, however skilled and creative Whittaker is, the celebration of her work is always ‘under the umbrella of Barley Studios’. Like Howson she could well have been overshadowed and hidden within the machine, ‘working for the man’, but instead she excels within the stained glass community.

Keith Barley has founded a highly regarded stained glass conservation, restoration and contemporary glass business and subsequently been awarded an MBE. As we can see from figures 31 and 32, the multi-award-winning company has much to celebrate.



Figure 31: Keith Barley being awarded the MBE



Figure 32: Helen Whittaker receiving the Hancock Medal for High Achievement from the Prince's Foundation

With credit to Keith Barley, in the 21st Century, Whittaker has had an exceptional career under the engagement of Barley Studios. She has thrived within Keith Barley's enterprise and patronage, his connections and resources have proved invaluable to her calling.

It should also be noted that her creativity and exceptional talent have complemented and enhanced the Barley Studio business acumen – a mutually beneficial arrangement. Helen Whittaker is keen to tell the story from her perspective:

Up to 1998, Barley Studio was solely known for conservation, except for the work Keith Barley did with Patrick Reyntiens at Southwell Minster. Previous to this, Keith tried to develop new commissions with Steve Collins (Swansea), but without result.

On graduating from the Prince's School, I brought with me quite a few connections and commissions that were progressed with the support of Barley Studios; their knowledge of fabrication and business resources. This has shown to be a fruitful collaboration that created a spring board for Barley Studio's reputation in new work and my roles as Creative Director since 2012 and the Designer/Artist since 1998 (WHITTAKER, 2022).

Perhaps, one day, Whittaker will have bestowed upon her the honour of creating her own art for Westminster Abbey, and the celebration and rewards will be well deserved. Her name would be signed on the installation and recorded for posterity in these hallowed halls, in recognition of her significant contribution to contemporary stained glass within Westminster Abbey. She is a truly inspirational role model to women all over the world, whose name should never be hidden, forgotten or invisible.

Dorothy Marion Grant at Exeter Cathedral – Women and the church

The British Society of Master Glass Painters (BSMGP) has been celebrating its Centenary this year, 2021/22. According to their website they “promote the highest standards of design, craft and creativity in stained glass”. The Society asserts: “Our mission is to be the foremost authority on contemporary and historic stained glass in Britain”. Since 1924 the Society has produced an academic publication, *The Journal of Stained Glass*, with “fully-illustrated articles on all aspects of stained glass history, conservation and contemporary practice, our annual Journal is an invaluable resource” (BSMGP, 2022).



Figure 33: D. Marion Grant



Figure 34: Detail of design for Lady Chapel Window, Exeter Cathedral



Figure 35: Detail of Lady Chapel Window, Exeter Cathedral

This Journal has indeed been invaluable throughout current and past research of women stained glass artists. There are so many golden insights into all the members and contributors of the 20th and 21st Century that a picture can be built up of their character and achievements, which cannot be gleaned from anywhere else. For instance, in the memoirs of Victor Drury (1899-1988), the son of Alfred Drury who set up the Glass House with Mary Lowndes, published in the Journal of 1997 he recalls the working practices of many of the notable artists he worked with and for.

In particular, he fondly remembers Dorothy Marion Grant:

“A different style was that of Marion Grant, who produced an incredibly elegant, large-scale sketch (rather in the style of Martin Travers) in which all the problems and details had already been worked out, and it seemed all that remained was to cut and paint the glass with the sketch as the guide” (DRURY, 1997, pp. 68-74).

This quote, from a highly respected professional businessman who kept the Lowndes and Drury enterprise thriving until his retirement in 1973, is a really useful insight into how well-regarded Grant was amongst her peers. It was noted in previous research that women started to take a greater role in the Society following the Second World War (Fowler, 2020), and this was especially true of Grant. She held membership of the Society from 1949 until long after her retirement from making in 1972 and was a respected member of the Society’s Council for at least 15 of those years. In his foreword of volume XI(2) (1953) the editor, H. T. Kirby remarks “Miss Grant does the Society much honour”. These affectionate comments are testament to the professionalism, impeccable standards and highly regarded work of Grant.

The archives of her work were presented to the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 2000 upon the closing of the estate of her relative, John Grant and are currently inaccessible due to planned relocation of the archive building. So, an adventure to try to get to know the artist better led this research to Exeter Cathedral. The Archivist was delighted to share sight of the original design, framed and on display on the wall next to her desk because she knows that the installation in the Lady Chapel of Exeter Cathedral is one of a kind. It is designed and made by a woman artist, trained in the traditional craft of stained glass (by Francis Howard Spear (1902-1979)) at the London County Council, Central School of Arts and Crafts, a well-regarded Fellow and committee member of the BSMGP, working with a devoted network of colleagues, artists and craftsmen and women of the firm Lowndes and Drury (Gray, 2019, p. 127).

The Archivist very kindly sorted through and presented documents, dated March 1950, pertaining to the process of commissioning Grant to replace the windows in the Lady Chapel that had been destroyed in the bombing of Exeter in 1942. Among those documents were two letters from The Very Reverend Eric Milner-White (1884 to 1963) Dean of York to the Dean of Exeter, Reverend Spencer Cecil Carpenter (1877-1959).

To set the background for Reverend Eric Milner-White it is to be noted that The Sheldon Memorial Trust, a charity based in York set up to administrate the legacy of Oliver Sheldon, a Director of Rowntree & Co Ltd, runs annual lectures about notable white, middle class men alongside their programme of awards and prizes (Sheldon Memorial Trust, 2022). In 2016, as part of the York Festival of Ideas they hosted a discussion about ‘the life, career and personality of York’s most remarkable Dean’, and in 2019 the annual Sheldon Memorial Lecture was dedicated solely to him. They describe him thus:

Eric Milner-White was Dean of York from 1941 until his death in 1963, having previously been Dean of King’s College, Cambridge. Today he is best known for his moulding of the modern Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols and for his controversial re-ordering of the mediaeval glass in York Minster.

His career as a priest in a working-class area of London, First World War military chaplain, churchman, educationalist and collector are now largely forgotten. Sixty plus years after his death, his life, achievements and reputation are worth revisiting as those of a Remarkable Dean (SHELDON MEMORIAL TRUST, 2019).

The first letter gives Milner-White’s opinion on Marion Grant’s original design propositions. The full transcript of the letter can be found at Appendix B. He starts the letter:

My dear Spencer,

I am sorry to say that I look on Miss Grant’s disquisition as pure rubbish and agree with your Canon’s criticisms absolutely. In addition, there are some things which shake my faith in her as a glass designer (MILNER-WHITE, 1950).

This negative and defamatory language does not equate with what is known about D. Marion Grant. However, very little has been recorded about her, other than the aforementioned insights published in the Journal of Stained Glass, so the letter needs a closer inspection to see if there is any basis for this tone.

The letter is a response to a call for advice from the Dean of Exeter (Spencer Carpenter) to the Dean of York (Eric Milner-White), peer to peer. Another member of the clergy has

raised doubt on the subject matter of the first design proposal for the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral and Reverend Carpenter seeks reassurance and affirmation from Milner-White on how to act upon his emergent doubts.

Having called into question the credibility of Grant as a professional stained glass designer Milner-White goes on to ridicule the symbolic subject matter of her contemporary design proposal with words like “absurd in meaning and design” and “recondite and symbolically far-fetched”. Instead, he suggests the more traditional five stations of Mary:

“Thus you get a central history of Our Lady in the five middle panels, the old testament type on the outside left, and something akin to woman’s Glorification by Mary to balance woman’s Fall by Eve, on the right” (MILNER-WHITE, 1950).

It would appear that Milner-White was deliberately furthering a narrative that could be perceived as negative or sexist by reinforcing the subliminal messages and symbolism encoded into the traditional storyline. A feminist viewer could see the semiotics behind his patriarchal edict in a very different way. An alternative view into a dimension where the emphasis morphs from the traditional, how it has always been, to the disgraceful and degrading:

- ❖ The Temptation of Eve – The first woman, blamed for all the problems in the world.
- ❖ Annunciation - Proclamation that the male deity will take over the body of a teenage girl for his own procreative needs
- ❖ The Nativity – Unmarried and vulnerable teenage girl gives birth to a male child
- ❖ Mary at the Cross – Powerless, in grief and suffering – the lot of the woman
- ❖ The woman clothed with the sun – A woman can only reach her highest potential if she produces a male child

In fact, he declared his intentions within the letter: “The theme is absolutely central to the meaning of a Lady Chapel, and perfectly simple to them that behold” (Milner-White, 1950).

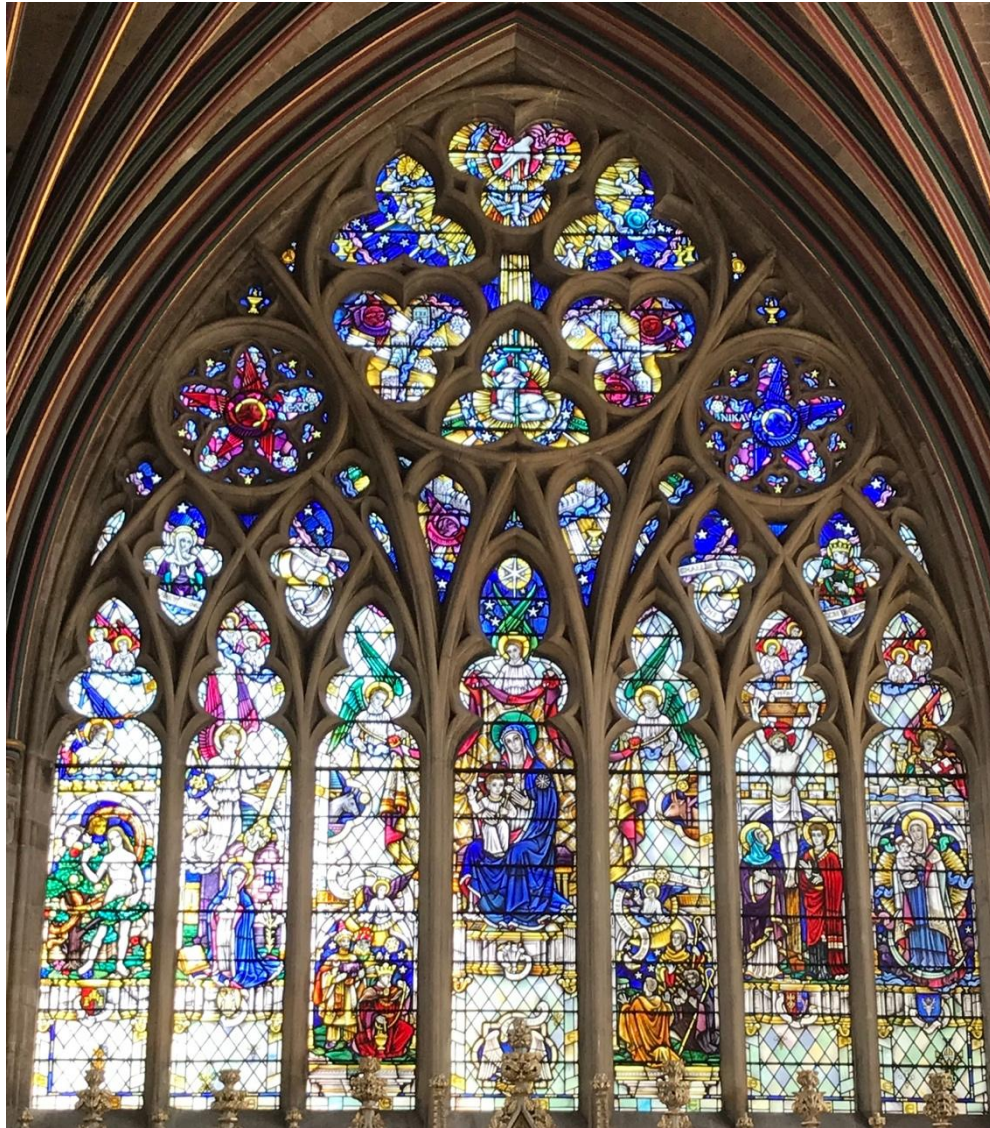


Figure 36: Lady Chapel Window at Exeter Cathedral

So, what of the second letter? It was again from the Reverend Eric Milner-White to Referend Spencer Carpenter who had asked for opinion on another stained glass artist – Michael Bell, son of Reginald Bell of the very well regarded firm Clayton and Bell. The full transcript can be found at Appendix C.

The response came:

The son has had a first-rate education; he was in his father's House and mine at Harrow! That, by no means, means that he would produce anything inspired, but it has some weight in the scale against his begetting anything feeble! (MILNER-WHITE, 1950)

The comparison of the content within these two letters is disturbing. The blatant nepotism within the second letter shows how rife and unchallenged the practice was within the establishment in the 1950s and begs the question whether the unsavoury practice has yet been eradicated. However, the sexism and insidious misogyny within the first letter leaves a bitter taste. Kate Manne (2017) in her book *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny*, gives a definition of sexism and misogyny that cuts through the mystery and aids understanding:

This chapter [Discriminating Sexism] argues that we should use the terms “sexism” and “misogyny” to mark an important contrast. Sexism is taken to be the branch of patriarchal ideology that justifies and rationalises a patriarchal social order, while misogyny is the system that polices and enforces its governing norms and expectations. So, sexism is scientific; misogyny is moralistic. Sexism wears a lab coat; misogyny goes on witch hunts (MANNE, 2017, pp. 78-80).

Sexism, misogyny, nepotism, if only these were the only failings of Milner-White. Dr Sarah Brown, an eminent historian and expert in the conservation of stained glass, has come across Milner-White in her research. She sums up her findings in her chapter in *The art of collaboration: stained glass conservation in the twenty-first century* (2010), a conference proceedings report. Her narrative highlights the strong personality of Milner-White with use of words like 'charismatic' (2010, p. 64), but not necessarily in a good way:

However, despite the fact that the Dean constantly refers to "our" work and acknowledges the contribution of the glaziers, it is clear that his was the overriding authority (BROWN, 2010, p. 65).

In a chapter extolling the virtues of what can be learned and achieved through collaboration, this statement is not at all complimentary. Brown goes on to call out Milner-White's decisions in the management of conservation and restoration of the stained glass at York Minster for which he was responsible as "decisive, drastic and draconian". Quoting Milner-White himself Brown makes her point: "we have abolished all three windows and substituted old windows of far higher quality and infinitely greater interest" (Brown, 2010, p. 58).



Figure 37: Reverend Eric Milner-White

Brown sums up Milner-White's privilege perfectly:

The social mores of the age would have created a relationship of deference in the workshop and the Dean's social superiority was reinforced by his clerical status, education, and celebrity. Milner-White took little external advice, something that Gibson [the glazing apprentice], his most loyal defender, later acknowledged with regret (BROWN, 2010, p. 58).

Susan Dowell and Linda Hurcombe in their book *Dispossessed Daughters of Eve, Faith and Feminism* explain that “the Bible in true mythic fashion moulds the way our culture perceives and organises reality” (1987, p. 21). They go on to stress that:

Any feminist who takes on a serious biblical study has to pass through a kind of spiritual endurance test in order to acquire a spiritual second wind about the stories, before she can respect the text, to find that a measure of love and truth remain (1987, p. 21).

In order for Grant to come up with such an inspired and sensitive rendition of the five stations of Mary for the Lady Chapel at Exeter Cathedral, particularly if she had any inkling of the rude and disrespectful letter that came from the hand of the incumbent Dean of York, she would definitely have had to acquire a spiritual second wind. We will never know whether she knew about the specific misogynistic constructs at play behind closed doors of the Anglican hierarchy, but her ability to rise above it and produce her best work is another testament to her resilience and professional wisdom.



*Figure 38: Silhouette of
Miss D. Marion Grant*

On behalf of Dorothy Marion Grant, and all other women who have had to suffer the indignities of systemic sexism, the words of French philosopher and writer, Helene Cixous are most appropriate:

The future must no longer be determined by the past. I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them, to confer upon them an irremovability the equivalent of destiny, to confuse the biological and the cultural (CIXIOUS, ET AL., 1976, p. 875).



Figure 39: Detail of West Window in Sunderland Minster



Figure 40: East Window in St George the Martyr, Southwark

It seems the first design Grant conceived of for Exeter Cathedral was not wasted. Figure 40 shows the scheme created for St George the Martyr in Southwark, London installed in 1952. The elements that Milner-White objected to, those that he stated were “absurd in meaning and design” and “recondite and symbolically far-fetched” (Milner-White, 1950), are all there in splendour. The Ascending Christ, the representation of the Cross and the Pelican feeding her chicks all make a glorious sight to behold in this grand Victorian monument to the glory of God.

The Pelican is an ancient Christian symbol “believed to pierce its own breast with its beak and feed its young of its blood. It became a symbol of Christ sacrificing himself for man – and because of this was frequently represented in Christian art” (Durham Cathedral, 2022). Exeter Cathedral had to wait until 1953 before Grant was ready to install in their Lady Chapel. Justice and retribution? One would like to think so.

Whether D. Marion Grant is celebrated or not is debatable, this research has not found any real celebration of her work apart from some trinkets for sale in Exeter Cathedral that took sections of her windows and reproduced them into suncatchers (see Figure 41). These do not even have an attribution to her as the original designer, so the Cathedral is making money using her design without any acknowledgement to her as creator.

As more than 50 years have passed they are not breaking any copyright laws, but they are equally not celebrating the life and work of someone who installed art with devotion into their sacred space.



Figure 41: Suncatcher for sale at Exeter Cathedral

Very little has been researched or published about her life and work. There was a short obituary in the *Transactions of the Ancient Monuments Society* (Bulmer-Thomas, 1989) that reveals some personal details about her love of cats and the fact that she was one of the founder members of *Friends of Friendless Churches*, an organisation explained further in Chapter Five. There is a succinct entry within Gray's *British Women Artists* (2019, p. 127), quite rightly as Grant has her work installed not only in Exeter Cathedral, but also in Sunderland Minster (see Figure 39) and St George the Martyr, Southwark (see Figure 40) two city churches of great importance.

Grant deserves much more research, when the V&A archives are open again, if only to dispel the ghost of Milner-White who deliberately cast aspersions upon Grant and her practice. We will never know the damage he may have caused to her career. Perhaps that is why it has been so difficult to find any sort of celebration of her life and work, so fragile was the professional reputation of a female artist in the 1950s.

Margaret Agnes Rope at Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral – A woman's touch

The story of Margaret Agnes Rope starts with the creation of Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral in 1856 and some great men who envisioned its manifestation. This chapter, however, is not just about the evolution of a sacred place, but also about art particular to women and how women's expression of themselves should be celebrated.

Margaret Agnes Rope, known by her friends and family as 'Marga', is not to be confused with her younger cousin also named Margaret Rope (1891-1988). That is Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope to be more precise, known by her family as 'Tor', short for tortoise, but no-one really knows why. M. E. Aldrich Rope, as she signed herself professionally, next to a little sketch of a tortoise, was also a prolific stained glass artist and assisted her cousin, Marga, with some of their larger projects (Cormack, 1985). For the purposes of this chapter they shall be referred to by their nicknames, Marga and Tor, for ease of reference.



Figure 42: "Marga"
Margaret Agnes Rope



Figure 43: "Tor"
Margaret Edith Aldrich Rope

The creation of The Cathedral Church of Our Lady and St Peter of Alcantara, otherwise known as Shrewsbury Catholic Cathedral, was the vision of John Talbot (1791-1852), the 16th Earl of Shrewsbury. Talbot campaigned for the rights of Catholic people, objecting to prejudicial laws that forced those who held public office to renounce their Catholic tradition. Shrewsbury Cathedral (2022) records:

Writing in 1828, [John Talbot] lamented that ‘The Catholic Peer is defrauded of his hereditary rights; the Catholic commoner, of the opportunities which wealth or talent might afford him to serve his country, in situations of honour and of trust.

Talbot was a generous benefactor of the Catholic Church. In 1851 he provided the funds to build a Cathedral for the new Shrewsbury Diocese and commissioned his favourite architect, Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin (1812 – 1852), a convert to Catholicism, to design it. Having worked together to design and build Alton Abbey and Castle (now Alton Towers) and St Chad’s Cathedral in Birmingham, among many other projects, the business partnership made a considerable impact on Victorian Britain (Fisher, 2002).

Unfortunately, both men died before construction could get underway, so responsibility was passed to Talbot’s young cousin and heir Bertram Talbot (1832-1856) and Pugin’s son, Edward Welby Pugin (1834-1875). The Cathedral was formally consecrated in 1856, but construction, additions and alterations continued until finally, in 1906 a new entrance porch was erected to celebrate the completion of the Cathedral (Shrewsbury Cathedral, 2022). It had taken 55 years to complete but, as yet, there was no stained glass to speak of.

In the meantime, Marga was born in Shrewsbury, into a very religious and creative family. Her first cousin once removed, Arthur Rope, publishes his research on the family online as he maps the achievements of Ellen Mary Rope (sculptor), George Thomas Rope (graphic artist), Dorothy Anne Aldrich Rope (sculptor), Henry Edward George Rope (writer, poet and priest), as well as Marga and Tor who produced more than 150 pieces of ecumenical art, both stained glass and painted panels, between them (Rope, 2022).

Stories of Marga's young life are recorded in the writing of her brother Henry and letters from her youngest sister, Irene, neither of whom were particularly complementary. We are told of a rebellious young woman, recklessly climbing trees, sleeping on a flat roof outdoors in all seasons, smoking cheroots and riding a motorbike. Arthur Rope reminisces:

One story tells of her and Irene riding over to Suffolk around the beginning of The Great War and briefly being arrested on suspicion of being German spies. She rebelled against norms for women at the time, wearing her hair short, dressing practically rather than decoratively, and smoking (ROPE, 2022).

Rope's tales build a picture of a headstrong, independent woman who knew her own mind and beliefs. However, the early death of her father, a much-loved local doctor, Dr Henry John Rope (1847-1899), came as a great shock. Despite specific conditions within her maternal grandfather's will disinheriting anyone in the family who converted to Catholicism, Marga's mother, Agnes Maud (née Burd) (1857-1948), Marga and four of her five siblings all did just that, showing their commitment to their faith rather than financial security. Following the premature demise of Marga's father, the family struggled financially and Marga was without the support of a wealthy family, setting her apart from many of her peers.

At the age of 18, Marga attended the Birmingham Municipal School of Art where she studied enamelling, lettering and stained glass under Henry Albert Payne (1868-1940), a former pupil of Christopher Whall and a well renowned Arts and Crafts practitioner and tutor. Marga spent nine years studying at Birmingham and was awarded several scholarships, medals, prizes and commendations (Gray, 2019, p. 290 and Cormack, 2018, p. 118). More than a hundred years later, two of the panels she made as a student were sold by Christie's Auction House, in 2014, to museums in the USA. *Goblin Market*, based on a poem by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894) an artist and writer closely associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, was bought by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (The Met, 2022). *The Well of Love* based on a tale by the mediaeval storyteller Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) was bought for over \$46,500 by the Los Angeles County Museum (Mutual Art, 2022).



Figure 44: *Well of Love*



Figure 45: *Goblin Market*

Rope tells us that the first commission Marga undertook following her training was for ‘a small St Francis panel for the church of St Hugh of Lincoln, Letchworth (now moved to a new church on an adjoining site)’ that she completed at home, at The Priory in Shrewsbury, probably with the help of Henry Payne’s studio (Rope, 2022). Very soon after this she was commissioned to design and install six lights plus tracery in the Great West Window of Shrewsbury Cathedral. At the age of 27 this was a huge honour and challenge for an artist not yet tried and tested, but the staff at the Cathedral knew her personally and put their trust in her (Shrewsbury Cathedral, 2022). In his tome *Arts and Crafts Stained Glass*, Peter Cormack, acclaimed stained glass historian and author, comments on the window:

The six-light west window (1909–10) of Shrewsbury Roman Catholic Cathedral, is a remarkable achievement, comparable in its impressive figure drawing and richly coloured landscape elements to Payne’s own glass (2015, p. 118).

Marga designed and installed seven different schemes for the Cathedral over the next three decades, as well as a carved and painted war memorial in the entrance porch. The photographs below were taken on a visit to the Cathedral in 2018. The stunning beauty was awe inspiring and the technical skill was an inspiration, a glory to behold, an experience of the sublime. It was an honour to be shown into the Sacristy too, to see a small yet intricate installation not normally accessible to the public.



Figure 46: St Ambrose Window in the Sacristy at Shrewsbury Cathedral



Figure 47: Detail of Baptistry Window at Shrewsbury Cathedral

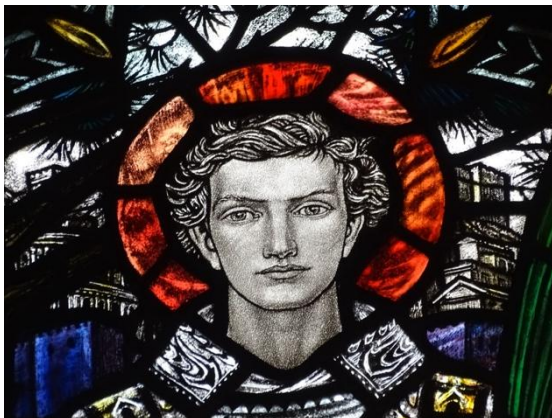


Figure 48: Detail of St Lawrence Window at Shrewsbury Cathedral



Figure 49: Detail of St Lawrence Window at Shrewsbury Cathedral



Figure 50: Detail of Baptistry Window at Shrewsbury Cathedral

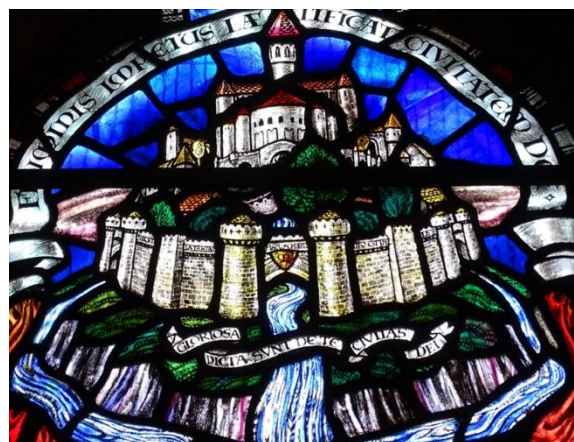


Figure 51: Detail of Baptistry Window at Shrewsbury Cathedral

When the Great West Window was completed and installed Marga moved from Shrewsbury to London. She must have realised that to progress professionally within her art form she needed access to workshop facilities and a community of peers, the Glass House at Fulham was specifically designed for such a need. Marga became part of a prolific network of women stained glass artists, Mary Lowndes, Caroline Townsend, Joan Howson and her cousin Tor to name a few. Cormack, speaks highly of Marga's style of art following her move from Shrewsbury to the Glass House:

Its characteristically Birmingham School elements, such as the meticulous figure drawing and landscape details, glow in rich colour against the kind of sparkling quarry-glazed background typical of work by Whall's pupils – illustrating how an already accomplished artist could find the Glass House milieu a fertile source of ideas worth adding to her own repertoire (CORMACK, 2015, p. 249).

No record of romantic love has been found, Marga certainly never married or had children. It is unlikely we will ever know the thoughts going through Marga's mind when in 1923, at the age of 41 she left London to enter a Carmelite monastery and became Sister Margaret of the Mother of God. A complete change of direction for the headstrong, independent, unconventional young woman she had been thus far, perhaps a longing for the spiritual life, some peace and solitude, in order to follow her faith and her passion.



*Figure 52: Sister Margaret
of the Mother of God*

It is to our benefit that the monastery recognised her talents and provided her with studio space, so she could continue working on her stained glass designs and making. Lowndes and Drury supported her by cutting the glass, sending it to her for glass painting, which she then returned for firing, leading and installing. For years she worked in this way, with the assistance of her cousin, Tor, until the turmoil of 1939, the start of the second world war, put an end to the arrangement (Cormack, 1985, p. 12).

The most remarkable piece of ecumenical art by Marga witnessed to date was created through this procedure in 1938. Forty miles from Swansea in South Wales is the picturesque town of Llandovery, where, in the small Catholic Church of Our Lady, an equally small but beautifully executed memorial window, *The Benedicite*, had a profound affect. Created in memory of Marga's nephew Herbert (3 days old) and niece Teresa (15 years old), who were the children of Irene Mary Vaughan (née Rope) (1889-1993), Marga's sister (Rope, 2022). So much emotion must have flowed into the creation of this design.



Figure 53: Detail of upper half of Margaret Rope's window at Our Lady Catholic Church in Llandoverly



Figure 54: Detail of lower half of Margaret Rope's window at Our Lady Catholic Church in Llandoverly

What was moving about this beautiful window was the striking symbolism of the feminine. The rainbow and birds, the figures and horse are all indicative of Marga's exacting style and standard. But the comparison between the wound of Christ, who suffered and died for the sins of the world, and the vivid yonic, the female body parts that bring life into the world (hidden in plain sight behind the clitoral red halo of the Virgin Mary), is astonishing.

The priest admitted that he had never really looked at the window despite people often making the journey to come and see it. This author was too surprised and self-conscious to point out the explicit imagery, the taboo of the feminine. To shatter the innocence of the poor priest was more than could be taken responsibility for.

It has become apparent, since that visit, that from mediaeval times the mystical iconic images of the wound of Christ (see Figure 55) have often been transposed with images reminiscent of the vagina, in the shape of the mandorla, regularly displaying the glory of the aureole (Pearson, 2001; Walker 2016).



*Figure 55: Prayer Book and Psalter
of Bonne of Luxembourg*



*Figure 56: St Mary Magdalene,
Patron Saint of Women*

In contrast to Marga's window, red with passion and emotion, is another memorial window adjacent (see Figures 57 and 58), designed and installed by Marga's peer and Glass House colleague Joseph Edward Nuttgens (1892-1982). This second window, entitled *Christ in Majesty with Saints*, is dedicated to the memory of Herbert Reginald Henry Vaughan (1893-1978), Marga's brother-in-law, Irene's husband. The scheme is calm and serene with the Christ figure sitting inside the same mandorla shape, but this time it symbolises a gateway to the heavens with stars on a pale blue background.

The halos are red to link with *The Benedicite* window, and the writing is in the same style, but the colours are pale blues and greens with sections of clear glass adding to the calm, reflective air. The saintly figures have their arms raised to bestow blessing on the less fortunate, rather than the gestures of the figures in Marga's window in adoration of the Christ child.

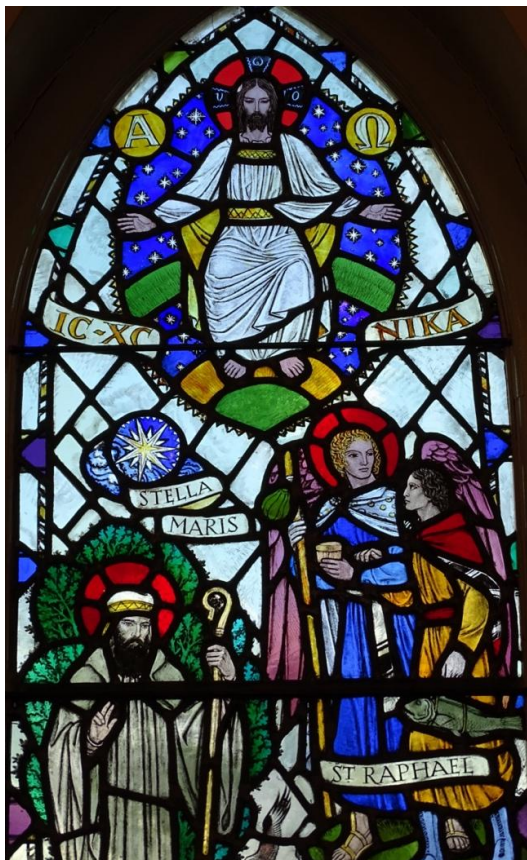


Figure 57: Detail of upper half of
Christ in Majesty with Saints,
Our Lady Catholic Church, Llandovery



Figure 58: Detail of lower half of
Christ in Majesty with Saints,
Our Lady Catholic Church, Llandovery

The difference between the art of men and the art of women has long been debated. In 1988 Linda Nochlin, an art historian and feminist author dared to ask “Why have there been no great women artists?”. A rhetorical question, of course, because there have been many great women artists, but it is widely recognised that until recently the patriarchal art historians have not deemed it necessary to record the stories of women artists. Nochlin explains what it is that makes art by women so special:

Women’s art demonstrates a different ‘greatness’ to art by men, both in its ‘formal and its expressive qualities’, the artwork conveys the special character of women’s situation and experience. There is a quality to women’s art that is, at least in part, the result of its capacity to express the conditions that make it necessary
(MACKENZIE AND MACKENZIE, 2014, QUOTING, NOCHLIN, 1988).

The two adjacent windows are a prime example of the difference between art of women and the art of men, the feminine and the masculine, the vulnerable and the invincible.

We women artists make no apology for our difference. Let the art critics call our efforts ‘decorative’ or ‘too feminine’. Once again French philosopher Hélène Cixous expresses words most apt:

Nor is the point to appropriate their instruments, their concepts, their places, or to begrudge them their position of mastery. Just because there’s a risk of identification doesn’t mean that we’ll succumb. Let’s leave it to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsession with how to dominate the way things work – knowing “how it works” in order to “make it work.” For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalise or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to “fly” (CIXIOUS, ET AL., 1976).

Long before the term ‘feminism’ or ‘feminist art’ was coined Marga knew how to “dash through and to fly” (Cixous, et al., 1976), how to make her art her own, even if it astounded the viewer for its blatant references to the feminine.

Unfortunately, by the end of the second world war Marga's health had deteriorated significantly. Preliminary sketches for Marga's final commission, to be installed in the new monastery site at Quidenham in Norfolk, were fulfilled by Tor in the 1950s. Sister Margaret died of fibrosis of the lungs on the 6th December 1953 (Gray, 2019, p. 290).

Despite the fact that so little is known or recorded about the day-to-day life of Marga, her diaries and business documents having been destroyed in a fire in London (Stuart, 2022), there are some very enthusiastic supporters dedicated to keeping her memory alive. In 2014 Shrewsbury Museum agreed to work with researcher Mark Stewart and the Margaret Rope Appreciation Group to create an exhibition about her life and work. The resultant exhibition is one of the only showcases for a single Arts and Crafts stained glass artist to date and has generated significant interest in Marga, not least the production of a 15 minute BBC documentary, a slot on BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour, Arthur Rope's book *Margaret Rope of Shrewsbury* and The Carmelite Community of East Anglia publishing its *Centenary History* with a whole section on Marga (Stewart, 2022). Mother M. Xavier McGonagle extols Marga's virtues:

Margaret Rope, in bequeathing these artistic treasures to Shrewsbury Cathedral, is at the same time displaying her religious artistic genius and the rare quality of beauty and depth of her own spiritual pilgrimage through this mortal life to the gates of heaven
(DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY, 2021).

Of all the women stained glass artists researched for this piece of writing, it would seem Margaret Agnes Rope is the most celebrated. By her home-town, by her family, by the stained glass community and by the Margaret Rope Appreciation Group. The Shrewsbury Civic Society has even installed a blue plaque at the house where she grew up (Stewart, 2022). For a woman who preferred to stay out of the limelight and didn't sign her own work, she is celebrated indeed.

Moira Forsyth at Guildford Cathedral – The transience of sacred art

The abstract, spiritual constructs of ‘consecration’ and ‘the sacred’ give churches and cathedrals their “cultural category” (Sheldrake, 2001) worthy of the finest in materiality, craftsmanship and artistry. A visitor can reasonably expect to encounter the holy, the magnificent, the mysterious and the profound. This was certainly experienced at Guildford Cathedral on a recent research trip to seek out glorious glass. The handiwork of Moira Forsyth is evident throughout the monolithic sacred space and tempts the viewer’s eye ever upwards towards the heavens.



*Figure 59: Moira Forsyth working in her studio
at The Glass House*

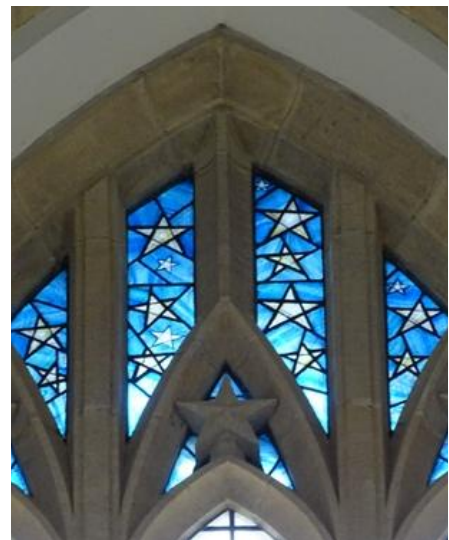


*Figure 60: Tracery windows in
Guildford Cathedral*

Jonathan Koestlé-Cate, a cultural historian and author of *Art and the Church, a Fractious Embrace*, brings an interesting philosophical perspective on stained glass as ecumenical art: “ideally, longevity in an ecclesiastical space permits an artwork to become more deeply embedded in the sacramental life of the community, as a congregation attains an ever-deepening appreciation” (2016, p. 97).

Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury, calls this phenomenon the “beyond” of an artwork: “that awareness of a depth in the observable world beyond what is at any moment observable”. This awareness is, he continues, “close to what seems to be meant by ‘the sacred’” (2005, p. 154).

Whilst undertaking the research for this thesis, it has become increasingly evident that over the past fifty years we have lost an immeasurable number of precious places of worship and beloved heritage at an alarming pace, due to lack of use, spiralling costs of conservation and restoration, and careless stealth. It is hardly surprising that the orthodox church and its authoritarian patriarchal constructs has fallen out of favour in our technological age of free expression and populism, a topic that requires far more discussion than this writing is designed for. However, the deconsecration and repurposing of our buildings of heritage, not to mention the wilful destruction by vandals and the consequential deprivation, is disturbing.



Figure 61: The Morning Star at the Church of the Holy Family, Farnham

So, what currently happens to the stained glass that was so lovingly made and installed into our local centres of community life over the past 100 years, when those parish churches become surplus to requirements? Moira Forsyth would be most interested to know how we are taking care of her legacy as, according to Lowndes and Drury's Archive Inventory printed in *The Glass House Special Issue* of the *Journal of Stained Glass* (2018, pp. 110-114), Forsyth had the most entries, that is, she produced the most business of all the artists who used Lowndes and Drury's services, including work for four different cathedrals, Guildford, Norwich, Bradford and Glasgow.

Whenever the life-story of Moira Forsyth is told, by Sarah Gray (2019, p. 108) or Alan Brookes and Peter Cormack (2018), or Sheila Mole (1987), it is always prefixed with the statement 'the daughter of ceramicist and stained glass designer Gordon Mitchell Forsyth, (1879-1952)', as though we would know who he was and why that was important. It is, however, of huge importance. We are told by Cormack that Gordon Forsyth was a student of Christopher Whall at the Royal College of Art in 1902, one of several star pupils in his cohort who went on to 'achieve eminence in careers encompassing a number of design and craft disciplines, stained glass among them' (Cormack, 2015, p. 107).

Forsyth's father is principally associated with ceramics as chief designer for Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian Pottery in Manchester and then as the Superintendent of Art Instruction for Stoke-on-Trent City Art Schools. He was not only tutored under Whall, but also by Professor of Painting, Gerald Moira (1867-1959), (after whom his daughter was named, one could speculate), and by Edward Johnston (1872-1944), famous for his fine lettering (Cormack, 2015, p. 107) and who also trained Forsyth twenty-five years later (Mole, 1987).

Arts and Crafts ideology was in the daughter's blood. Her father, a second generation Arts and Crafts practitioner (Cormack, 2015, p. 108) not only passed on the creative gene, but also everything he knew about art and design to both of his children when he brought home spare clay from work for them to play with (Mole, 1987). Forsyth was born in Cresswell, Staffordshire, although her father and mother, Elizabeth Lamont Forsyth (née Aiken) (1879-1957) were from Aberdeenshire. She studied ceramics at the Burslem School of Art, in Staffordshire (Gray, 2019, p. 108).

Sheila Mole, researcher for the *Journal of Stained Glass* interviewed Forsyth for a piece in the 1987 edition, where she reminisces how, after finishing art school, she set up a small studio for herself making ceramic pieces to sell at a stand at the White City Fair in 1926. She recalled that, at the age of 21, she was referred to as ‘the baby of the Fair’ and that ‘the Queen bought one of her exhibits’.

Her work proved very popular and many people made orders but, Mole tells us, this was the year of the General Strike, workshops and kilns were closed and orders could not be met. Not being able to fulfil the orders and having time on her hands, Forsyth took the Royal College of Art (RCA) entrance exam and won a National Scholarship. Whilst at the RCA, her interest changed from pottery to stained glass, under Martin Travers (1886-1948) another pupil of Christopher Whall, and she fondly remembered him as ‘a most encouraging teacher’ (1987).

When Forsyth graduated from the RCA in 1930 she took on several teaching roles, just to survive, but she did not enjoy them. She recalled one of her students used to take her home on occasion to feed her, the pay was so poor (Mole, 1987). In a bid to increase her stained glass practice Forsyth sent her portfolio to Heal’s, the furniture and design store on Tottenham Court Road in London. The Artistic Director at the store and associated Mansard Gallery, Lady Gladys Evelyn Prudence Stutchbury Maufe (1882-1976), recognised talent in Forsyth’s work and commissioned her to design the Christmas Catalogue. A mutual respect and lifelong friendship ensued. Lady Maufe introduced Forsyth to her husband Sir Edward Brantforth Maufe (1882-1974), an eminent architect and purveyor of ecumenical art (Ahmed and Dwyer, 2017).

In 2017 Nazneen Ahmed and Claire Dwyer of the Department of Geography at University College London published their research into the “importance of religious creativity in the making of suburban space”, which included letters revealing the working relationship between Edward Maufe and Forsyth during one of her first commissions for St Thomas the Apostle Church in West London in 1933.

Ahmed and Dwyer reveal:

The letters suggested a somewhat paternalist relationship between the architect and his more junior female artists. It is notable that the relatively inexperienced female artists, Moira Forsyth, Kathleen Roberts and Elizabeth Starling were given the more playful decorative space of the Lady Chapel and Children's Chapel unlike their male counterparts whose work was in the main church. Forsyth was also frustrated that her original designs for the stained glass windows were revised by the architect in line with his simple, austere aesthetic for the church (2017, p. 377).

It could be speculated that Forsyth made her point and won the respect of the architect in those assertive letters, because in 1940, just as Maufe's grand design, Guildford Cathedral, was in the process of being built, she conceived of and created the Rose Window for the eastern façade (see Figure 62), including bright colours of pinks and reds along with the blue base, despite Maufe's aversions.



Figure 62: Rose Window in Guildford Cathedral

In the late 1930s, whilst Forsyth was creating this window, developers had wanted to demolish the studios that she rented at St Oswalds in Fulham. Forsyth successfully campaigned alongside John Betjeman (1906-1984), the poet and activist passionate about the preservation of Victorian buildings. Their endeavours were successful and plans for development of the site were cancelled. In 1940 one of the first bombs over London exploded just behind her studio and Forsyth had to rescue her glass and cartoons before they too were destroyed (Mole, 1987). Soon after she moved to The Glass House in Fulham where she shared a studio with fellow stained glass artist Wilhelmina Geddes (1887-1955).

Interestingly, Betjeman was a founder member, in 1957, of what is now called *Friends of Friendless Churches* whose aim is to “rescue and repair redundant places of worship in England and Wales. We care for and celebrate their rich architectural legacy and history and support their local communities” (Friends of Friendless Churches, 2022).

We believe that an ancient and beautiful church fulfils its primary function merely by existing. It is, in itself, and irrespective of the members using it, an act of worship. These buildings are our greatest architectural and cultural legacy, shaping landscapes and lives for hundreds of years. They are the spiritual and artistic investment of generations, and they should survive for the benefit of future generations (FRIENDS OF FRIENDLESS CHURCHES, 2022).

Sentiments very close to this author’s heart, values and belief system. So, with that in mind the following narrative is intended to draw attention to, and raise the profile of, some churches that have not been so cherished.

An important, historical treasure that is in dire need of support is St Michael and All Angels Church in Ashton under Lyne, Greater Manchester. A Grade I listed building mentioned in the *Domesday Book*, with 18 panels of rare 15th Century (1490s) stained glass, illustrating the story of St Helena (National Churches Trust, 2022) attributed to the workshop of Richard Twygge and Thomas Wodshawe based in Malvern, who also produced work for The Great Malvern Priory and Tattershall College in Lincolnshire (The Rose Window, 2022).



Figure 63: Detail of 15th Century Glass depicting the story of St Helena at St Michael and All Angels, Ashton under Lyne



Figure 64: Detail of 15th Century Glass depicting the story of St Helena at St Michael and All Angels, Ashton under Lyne

In 2019, on a research trip to see work by Forsyth, her design for a window in this Church, dated 1964, portraying the story of the nativity, the birth of Jesus, was found to be very typical of her style and a joy to behold. Forsyth used strong lines to portray figures, with cross hatched shading because she believed flat washes dulled the colour of the glass (Mole, 1987). She was very particular about colour. In one of her many letters in the V&A archives she extols stained glass as an art form: “Not specifically a career for women ... physically tiring and heavy work. But for the enthusiast for light and colour, perhaps the most wonderful medium in the world” (Ahmed and Dwyer, 2017).

Whilst at St Michael and All Angels the Treasurer candidly explained that the Church was under threat of closure and had been given three years to turn its fortunes around. Its main source of income is the parking fees generated from a car park that has been created by covering over consecrated burial ground with a temporary surface in order to provide parking facilities for the local community.

The Treasurer expressed her concerns about the possibility of thieves and vandals damaging the priceless artefacts contained within the sacred space, in an area already considered not particularly salubrious. “The [considerable] annual premium to Ecclesiastical Insurance is one of our biggest expenditures, but how could we not insure a Grade 1 listed building with such a wealth of art treasures within it?” (Treasurer, 2022).

Recent enquiries into the progress following the three-year reprieve revealed the state of finances had become worse not better. People are using the car park less frequently, due to the cost-of-living crisis one could speculate, and the expense of running the facility is increasing, which results in a reduction in the profit it generates. Suggestions for diversifying the use of the building to meet the needs of the community, youth groups, mums and toddlers’ groups, slimmer’s clubs for instance, all met with disagreement from the long-time members of the church and managing elders. As a result the Church remains ‘at risk’ and its fate unknown, which includes the fate of Forsyth’s Nativity Window.



*Figure 65: Detail of Nativity Window
at St Michael and All Angels,
Ashton under Lyne*



*Figure 66: Detail of Nativity Window
at St Michael and All Angels,
Ashton under Lyne*



*Figure 67: Moira Forsyth's
signature*

There is no doubt that the 15th Century stained glass would be saved and re-sited by a benevolent not-for-profit organisation like the Stained Glass Repository (SGR), part of The Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass, who “rescue good quality glass under threat and seek to find new homes for it” (Glaziers Company, 2022). It is to be hoped that their strict criteria for acceptance will cover the work of Forsyth.

Upon investigation into the SGR current catalogue published online, of the 60 pieces that have been rescued and advertised in a catalogue for prospective rehoming, not one is identified as having been designed or made by a woman, although there are 19 pieces whose designer/maker has not been identified (Stained Glass Repository Catalogue, 2022).

There are also details of completed projects, on their website, where four schemes of rescued stained glass have been rehomed, again none by women. When asked to comment on the suppositions made by this research, the SGR gave a written response from which hope can be drawn:

The glass the SGR accepts is based on a criteria of quality and not sex/gender and the choices of what to attempt to rehome is made from whatever is offered to the SGR. The SGR is a voluntary organisation and does not have any statutory mandate and limited art historical expertise (STAINED GLASS REPOSITORY, 2022).

We can empathise with the frustration felt by the Stained Glass Repository, who can only offer help to those who come to them first, and they cannot be expected to keep abreast of pending building closures. The work they do is exceptional and all on a voluntary basis, without this facility matters could be so much worse.

In 1982 a series of windows were received into store from the Muswell Hill Methodist Church for safekeeping. The windows are by Miss A. Nora Yoxall and Miss E.M. Whitford of Blockley, Gloucestershire and are dated as 1936, a five light window and tracery and two light windows of a variety of subjects. The windows were later collected by G. Maile of Canterbury for restoration and relocation in the new Methodist Church Muswell Hill (STAINED GLASS REPOSITORY, 2022).

A heartening story indeed. All credit to Muswell Hill Methodist Church who took steps to ensure their precious gems were in safe hands whilst they rebuilt their premises. This shows the care and attention that can be bestowed upon beloved artworks, the facilities and networks are there to those who care to use them – but this was forty years ago!

Whilst visiting Norwich Cathedral two successfully relocated projects brokered by the Worshipful Company of Glaziers in 1997 and 2000 were witnessed. Work by Keith New (1926-2012), originally created for St Stephen Church, Walbrook in the 1970s (see Figure 68), has been adapted for the North Transept and complemented with pieces (see Figure 69) by John Hayward (1929-2007), both very well respected and celebrated stained glass artists. The re-sited windows by Keith New are considered modernist in style, moving away from the Arts and Crafts, figurative into the abstract, and very appropriate in the space to which they have been reassigned (Warren, 2017).



Figure 68: The Conversion of St Paul at Norwich Cathedral



Figure 69: Madonna and Child at Norwich Cathedral

However, apart from the example above, this research has found no examples of works by women that have been rescued from ruin through organisations like the Worshipful Company of Glaziers. There are reports, sadly, of work that has not been rescued, work that is not only at risk but “that which we feared most has come upon us” (The Holy Bible: Job. 3:25).

The Parish Church of Saint Benedict in Ardwick, Greater Manchester, was declared redundant by the local diocese and closed in 2002. Since then, it has been repurposed:

Today St. Benedict's is home to the Manchester Climbing Centre, an impressive facility aimed at experienced climbers and novices looking for exercise and a little adventure (MANCHESTER HISTORY, 2022).

Tor Rope, a contemporary and well-respected colleague of Forsyth, based at The Glass House in Fulham, has work installed in the former St Benedict's Church. Once considered part of the holy and sacramental life of the church (Koestlé-Cate, 2016, p. 97) her expressions of devotional worship are obscured behind climbing walls and pop-up banners (see Figure 70-71). It would appear that the building does not have listed status and whether the new owners would invest in the conservation and restoration of the ecumenical art when needed is open for speculation.



Figure 70: Manchester Climbing Centre, formerly St Benedict's Church, Ardwick



Figure 71: Work by Tor Rope at St Benedict's Church, Ardwick, now the Manchester Climbing Centre

An even worse fate, one could argue, is that of precious and unique windows by Forsyth's friend and colleague, Wilhelmina Geddes with whom she shared a studio at The Glass House. In 1935 Geddes installed windows that had taken two years to make, into Egremont Presbyterian Church in Wallasey near Liverpool. The windows were based on Psalm 100 – "For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting and his truth endureth to all generations" (The Newsroom, 2017). In 2011 the church was closed to parishioners, boarded up and left to decay, a plan destined for disaster. Disaster did happen on 26 July 2017 when vandals broke in and caused mindless damage to priceless, irreplaceable sacred art (see Figure 72) (Beleschenko, 2021).



Figure 72: Crichton Memorial Window in Egremont Presbyterian Church, Wallasey

It seems only a matter of time before such a fate is destined for Moira Forsyth's acts of devotion unless more is done to raise the issue of women's stained glass being overlooked, hidden, forgotten, invisible.

Forsyth was deeply religious, having converted to Catholicism as a young woman. She moved from London to Farnham in Surrey in the 1950s where she made the Catholic Church of the Holy Family her spiritual home. Between 1960 and 1978 she installed 14 windows into the small, simple 1950s building, an act of devotion indeed. Father David Buckley has published the history of Holy Family Church with Moira Forsyth as its star. He describes her windows as ‘artistic gems’ and ‘impressive and beautiful works of art’ (Holy Angels Church, 2022).

She was a member of the International Society of Christian Artists and served as President of the Society of Catholic Artists for several years (Ahmed and Dwyer, 2017), as well as council member for the BSMGP from 1965 to 1973 alongside Marion Grant (See Appendix 1). In 1974, on the recommendation of Sir Edward Maufe, among others, she was given a Queen’s Award for Service to the Arts (Mole, 1987), and still we cannot guarantee that her work will not fall to the fate of her equally important friends and colleagues Tor Rope and Wilhelmina Geddes.

Through the life and stories of Moira Forsyth, this chapter has explored the polarity that is the standing of stained glass from its consecration and acquired ‘sacred status’ (Williams, 2005, p. 154) to its decommission and potential destruction. What throw away times do we live in when our beloved sacred places, our national heritage, our treasured gems, fall into disrepair and ruin? Potentially dark days indeed.

Conclusion

When asked “why is it important to seek out stained glass by women?” those who do not understand are often of the opinion “Surely it is all the same, you cannot tell the difference?”, the feminist academic reasoning, using quotes from Irigaray and Nochlin, tend to befuddle the enquirer:

Women’s art demonstrates a different ‘greatness’ to art by men, both in its ‘formal and its expressive qualities’, the artwork conveys the special character of women’s situation and experience. There is a quality to women’s art that is, at least in part, the result of its capacity to express the conditions that make it necessary
(IRIGARAY QUOTING NOCHLIN, 1993, p. 153).

Instead, an analogy has been useful: Experiencing birds in the garden is a joyful experience. There are sparrows of abundance with their noisy chatter, blue tits and robins provide colourful entertainment. The blackbirds and song thrushes have a wonderful sound and goldfinches are a delight to behold. But when you discover a gold crest, or a nuthatch, or treecreeper, you take extra special delight because they are shy, rare and require an extra-special environment in which to thrive. So it is with stained glass by women; it is scarce, unique, often hidden by unwitting indifference or familiarity, and it deserves to be cherished and celebrated. This is the ‘so what?’. This is why it is vital to seek out and record examples, to raise their profile and highlight the potential jeopardy, which has been the whole aim of this research.

This inquiry has found that these five stained glass artists have so many things in common. They all studied at eminent art schools and won scholarships and prizes. They knew of each other and networked in the same circles, seeking out the company of like minded women. None of them married or had their own family, unlike their male counterparts. It appears that it was not considered restrictive at all for male stained glass artists to have a wife and children, Christopher Whall, Carl Edwards and Gordon Forsyth all had daughters who followed in their footsteps to become significant stained glass artists in their own right. However, for women to be successful in this field, it seems it was necessary to sacrifice the privilege of having their own family.

Even today women are having to ask the question:

I'm looking for some advice from fellow artists who are also parents. I have a 3 month old baby and about a 500 square foot stained glass studio unit ... I would love to be able to continue what I do, but do it safely with a growing baby ... I'm wondering how any of you managed to do stained glass with little ones at home, or in your workshop or if this is something we will never be able to do in the same space as him? Is this possible? Are we crazy? Any advice/ thoughts/concerns/resources to share with me would be greatly appreciated! (SYNNESTVEDT, 2022).

The toxic nature of glass paint, glass shards on the floor or lodged into work clothes, fumes from soldering in the air, not to mention the possibility of lead came offcuts ending up in a child's mouth are all a health and safety hazard and the long-term jeopardy to a young child doesn't bear thinking about. But then, if you go out to work you wouldn't expect to take a child with you, let us not forget, creating art is work!



Figure 73: St Margaret, Patron Saint of Childbirth

Perhaps the most profound similarity between our five case studies was each artist's faith and devotion that shored-up their resilience in some really demanding circumstances. One could even say their work was their passion, that nourished their creativity and generated some outstanding and notable sacred art, an act of worship to the glory of God. It would be derogatory to label their work as "purely decorative" just because it was created by a woman, although the letter written by the Reverend Milner-White (1950) about Marion Grant, irreverently did just that.

On the question whether their work is celebrated, one needs to ask, what is the measure of celebration? Is the fact that local historians have named their Society after Margaret Rope more of a celebration than Joan Howson's name on a notice board in the Charter House of Westminster Abbey? This research has found that the work of all five artists is celebrated to some degree or other. Mary Lowndes has a page on Wikipedia, as has Moira Forsyth and Joan Howson. D. Marion Grant and Moira Forsyth both have their documents and cartoons in the V&A Archives for posterity. Marga Rope has the love and respect of descendants and the local community who, in 2016 arranged an exhibition of her work in Shrewsbury, the legacy of which will be felt for many years to come (Stewart, 2022).

But surely there is no limit to restrict the celebration of their life and work. So that their contribution is never hidden or forgotten it needs to be brought into the light, into the consciousness of their respective communities. As custodians of this rare and unique art, which was created from a place of passion and devotion, we have rights and responsibilities to protect, conserve, celebrate and delight in the sacred heritage that has been bestowed upon us.

The Stained Glass Repository had another tantalising comment to make on this topic:

Glass by female artists often commands a high price on the commercial market and, as we have no funds to purchase glass, we have in the past lost glass which we would have willingly accepted (STAINED GLASS REPOSITORY, 2022).

We could speculate this quote refers to the works by Margaret Rope that were recently sold at auction for considerable sums of money and shipped off to be hidden in museum archives in the USA (The Met, 2022 and Mutual Art 2022) – another way to lose our beloved heritage, to the highest bidder. Having said that, the Stained Glass Museum in Ely Cathedral has recently acquired work by Wilhelmina Geddes when it came up for auction in February 2022 with considerable support from the Art Fund, Arts Council England and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund (Stained Glass Museum, 2022).

This is such an important shift in priorities, the art world is realising that women's stained glass is valuable, worth preserving and are willing to pay the price. It must be said that the Stained Glass Museum has been an advocate for stained glass made by women for a good few years. There are excellent examples both on permanent display and in the archives that the staff are only too pleased to give access to, with a little notice.

This current research has identified and recorded over 100 different sites where stained glass designed by women can be found. Due to time constraints, only a fraction of them have been visited and photographed. It is such a mammoth task and arguably should not be the responsibility of just one researcher.

This premise is true of all stained glass, as upheld by Dr Jasmine Allen, Curator of Ely Stained Glass Museum (2020) and Dr Martin Crampin, author of *Stained Glass from Welsh Churches* (2014), among other eminent voices. As a result of this call to action, in 2021 a new directory was published online called *Visit Stained Glass*. A collaboration between the Worshipful Company of Glaziers and Painters of Glass and the British Society of Master Glass Painters, "artists, conservators and authors have come together to highlight some of the most inspiring examples" (2022).

The choice of entries is, of course, subjective to each contributor's opinion, though it is good to see such a variety and diversity of both contributors and choices. The site is arranged so that searches can be done by stained glass artist, by site and geographically by map. Recommendations to visit stained glass by female artists are represented, although limited in number and concentrated on contemporary work, in the main.

Using the results from this research a similar online directory is hereby proposed, specifically for art by women stained glass designers, searchable by artist's name, by site and by geographic location in order to promote and celebrate those women who are generally under-represented. Appendix D is a draft directory and associated map that will build over time to form something worthy of publishing online.

To complement the proposed directory it would be beneficial to install a notice by each window giving a short biography of the artist, a title and explanation of the design with a link to the online directory and more information. To save space, this could be done by QR code, to encourage those interested to explore and learn more about this particular artist and others nearby.

Griselda Pollock, contemporary academic and feminist philosopher, along with her late colleague Rozsika Parker, in their book *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (1981) assert:

Women artists are not outside history or culture but occupy and speak from a different position and place within it. We can now recognise that place, that position, as essential to the meanings of western culture, for the opposition, feminine, ensures masculine meanings and masculine dominance. But that position is, for women themselves, contradictory and problematic, for if feminine is the negative of masculine and masculine is dominant, how do women artists see themselves and how do they produce meanings of their own in a language made by a dominant group which affirms men's dominance and power and reproduces their supremacy?

(PARKER AND POLLOCK, 1981, pp. 80-81).

However, it is important for the stained glass community and prospective female artists not to see women's stained glass as "negative", "in opposition" or in any way inferior to men's. It is to be celebrated that women's stained glass is different, but it is not "opposite", it is complementary and comes from a place that "conveys the special character of women's situation and experience" (Irigaray, 1993, p. 153).

In contrast to Parker and Pollock (1981), Cixous holds a more positive position:

For us the point is not to take possession in order to internalise or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to “fly”

(CIXIOUS, ET AL., 1976, p. 887).

As female stained glass artists, the message we need to take away from this research is to refuse to be limited by tradition or organisational bureaucracy, but instead to bring on the feminine! In order to compete in the contemporary marketplace, Cixous (1976) challenges us to stop constricting our creativity and holding ourselves back. The time has come to cease designing formal, formulaic pieces, instead we need to be true to our own unique vision, allow ourselves the permissions that our male counterparts have long taken for granted.

Mary Lowndes started the rally in 1914 and her message is as true today:

Seeking to rally her fellow campaigners, [Lowndes] emphatically stressed this was now ‘the age of woman’, the moment when women – and women artists in particular – would ‘lead a world-wide revolt against the prejudice and ancient tyranny that ... struggle ever to keep woman the inferior creature they proclaim her’ (THOMAS, 2020, p. 18).

Mary Lowndes’ contribution to female emancipation, and her aspirations for women to achieve their place in the social history of art, must never be underestimated. The Glass House was a vital resource with a major effect upon the lives and careers of so many glass artists. The cooperative model was inspiring and so admired that it was adopted in other parts of the world, most notably in Dublin, Eire, by artists who formed the An Túr Gloine (Tower of Glass), a very similar enterprise (Cormack, 2018). Without Mary Lowndes’ vision for The Glass House the history of stained glass would look very different today and the world would be poorer for it.

When asked, a senior member of staff at the Stained Glass Museum in Ely acknowledged that “quality in stained glass is subjective, there are no better or worse examples, only different” (2021). So when we, women stained glass artists, express our strength and personality, our flair and energy in our practice, that is what is classed as ‘exceptional’ stained glass - the portrayal of spirituality, emotion and passion - which takes a good deal of courage and risk to successfully achieve.

A contemporary stained glass artist based in Philadelphia, Judith Schaechter (1961-), is doing just that. One of the best known and highly celebrated stained glass artists of our time is rocking the stained glass world. The historic influences, from mediaeval to Victoriana, gothic to grotesque, are all there, but with a highly unique twist. Alex Baker has written the foreword to her catalogue of works, *Extra Virgin: The stained glass of Judith Schaechter* and explains:

While her work reflects a secular sensibility, Gothic stained glass, with its attention to keen craftsmanship and awe-inspiring utilisation of light, is a primary influence on Schaechter's work. Like Gothic saints, her figures are sometimes depicted in a state of transcendent suffering. Many of her figures also look up, literally in an illuminated reverie (SCHAECHTER AND BAKER, 2006).



Figure 74: Solitary Confinement

Schaechter “offers emotional intensity, a rawness successfully conveyed through a medium of radiant beauty” (Schaechter and Baker, 2006), something that could be said of all of the women in this research, in their time. Art styles and attitudes have changed, as must we in order to survive.

To answer Nochlin’s rhetorical question, “Why have there been no great women [stained glass] artists?” (1989), this investigation concludes that there have been, and still are, many great women stained glass artists and they deserve more recognition and celebration to reclaim their place within the stained glass historical art canon.

FOOTNOTE: This artist is honoured (and pleasantly surprised) to have a glass panel exhibited in the same touring exhibition as a piece by Judith Schaechter. The BSMGP Centenary Exhibition (2021–22) accepted St Margaret, Patron Saint of Childbirth (Figure 73) and it is currently being displayed in Manchester Cathedral alongside Solitary Confinement by Schaechter (Figure 74) - September 2022.

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