

STAINED GLASS

THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE STAINED GLASS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

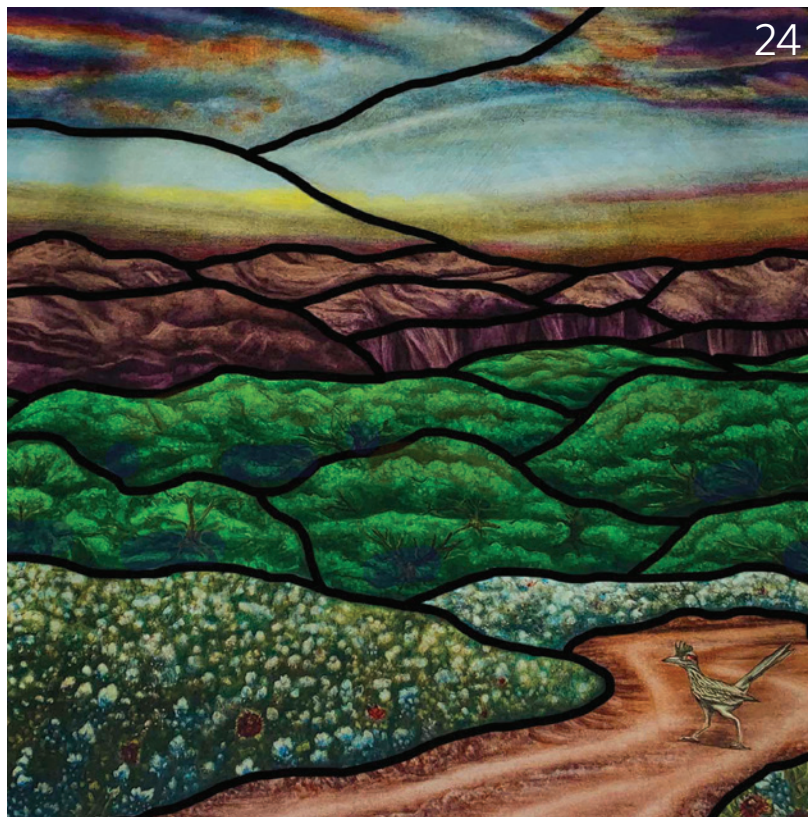
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Sheild Me, Mary Clerkin Higgins, 2017

The cover of this issue honors Mary Clerkin Higgins who passed on December 25th, 2020. She created **Sheild Me** in the period just after her first chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. "Plod. Plod. Plod" was her motto. Mary found the phrasing funny, but it was serious: one foot in front of the other, no matter how difficult. "Hand me my shield emblazoned with my motto—"Plod, Plod, Plod"—the only way I get things done. The motto may not be elegant, or inspiring—or in Latin—but it makes me laugh while also describing my reality."—MCH



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The Stained Glass Quarterly is an exchange of ideas and knowledge among readers, a means of carrying information and inspiration of our craft to the world.

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Stained Glass Conservation: Lessons from History

Preserving windows from
opposite ends of the last millennia

By Amelia J. Bedson

In 12th-century, predominantly Christian Europe, stained glass developed into the art form we recognise today. Great Gothic cathedral windows across Europe came to embody the pinnacle of stained glass art, religious philosophy, and technological innovation within the societies that made them.

However, as they exist today, many are not entirely a true representation of their inception. Through the passage of time, damage (both deliberate and unintentional) has changed some to be mere shadows of what they once were. Conservation has tried to keep pace with this, but early efforts have in most cases only made things worse. Contemporary cultural influences have also been superimposed upon the historic fabric of these windows. The great gothic stained glass windows that we are left with, though still magnificent in their own way, have lost many elements of their original creation.

This is the conundrum that faces all conservationists. Restoration or conservation? Since stained glass became an art form, the battle between the forces of degradation, restoration and preservation have ebbed and flowed. Restoration is the process of restoring a work of art to its original condition. Conservation is an endeavour that seeks to preserve an item in its current state and avoid further deterioration. Current practice is to attempt the latter in order to retain the historical integrity of an artifact. However, sometime before

Figure 3: City Hall Buffalo, New York, USA 2019
Photo: Bedson, 2019



Figure 1: The Deans Eye, Lincoln Cathedral; Photo: Lincoln Cathedral Stained Glass Conservation Department, 2019
 Figure 2: The Sunburst skylight, Buffalo City Hall, New York, USA; Photo: Bedson, 2019

enlightenment in the late 19th century, restoration was the predominant force at work due to a lack of skill, knowledge and informed debate. Early preservation techniques, not supported by a rigorous and scientifically based analytical approach, were in some ways still likely to do more harm than good.

This approach is exemplified by the preservation needs of two stained glass windows from very different eras. In the first instance the 13th-century Gothic Dean’s Eye Rose Window from Lincoln Cathedral in the U.K. [figure 1]. This represents a highpoint in Gothic stained glass manufacture and has survived for nearly 800 years. In contrast to this is the Art Deco Sunburst skylight window, suspended above the council chamber in the City Hall of Buffalo, New York, U.S. for 88 years [figure 2]. Both windows are considered amongst the finest examples of stained glass in the world from their relevant eras.

Comparing two windows at the opposite ends of last millennia offers unique insight into how the stained glass conservator might adopt a structured but practical

approach to conservation—one that is informed by an understanding of the historical object’s background and knowledge of the art and cultural history and technological influences behind the installation’s original conception.

CONSERVATION WITHIN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Dean’s Eye [figure 1] is one of the few examples of Gothic English 13th-century stained glass that still exists in situ. The stained-glass windows of this time were heavily influenced by the rituals and teachings of the Christian Church designed to help spread the word of God. In 1192 Lincoln Cathedral was rebuilt following a fire. The Dean’s Eye was its crowning glory, a Gothic masterpiece. However, with the passage of 800 years, the window we see now is not a true reflection of the original. Following the accession of Henry VIII to the throne, the dissolution of the monasteries (1530–40), and the English Civil War (1643–51), much of the stained glass was damaged or destroyed. Most of the major repairs to The Dean’s Eye took place from the mid-18th century and were undertaken by plumbers



Image of City Hall Council Chamber, June 2013; Photo: Jess Buttery



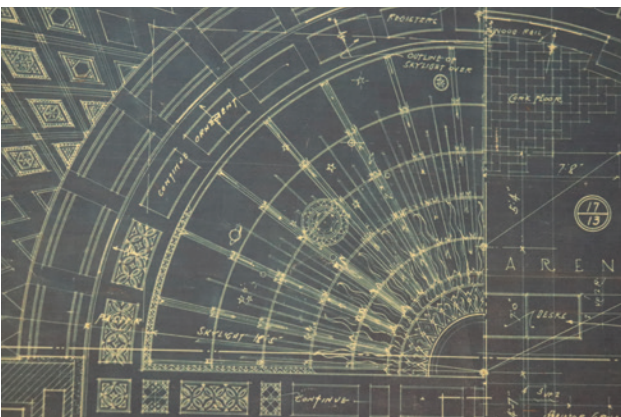
and glaziers. The history of The Dean's Eye at this point is therefore one of restoration and not conservation. The window had been recomposed in a picturesque fashion portraying more of the restorers' own ideas of composition rather than the original concepts.

Conservation predominated in the late 19th and 20th centuries when a greater understanding of stained glass manufacture evolved. However, there was still one historic event that would have a major impact on the history of The Dean's Eye: World War II. Lincoln Cathedral was a target for bombing. To protect the window, it was packed in sawdust and placed in a vault 60 feet below the Cathedral. This exposed it to high levels of humidity further deteriorating the glass.



800 years of history has exposed the Dean's Eye to tremendous change, but how does this compare with the Sunburst [figure 2]?

Buffalo, New York was incorporated as a city in 1832. It boomed during the early 1900s. In 1929, the city commissioned a civic centre to be designed by architect John Wade, directing him to conceive of a structure to match the city's aspirations. Despite the start of The Great Depression, the 32-story City Hall was built of riveted steel and concrete taking inspiration from the Art Deco movement [figure 3].



Its crowning glory was a spectacular stained glass skylight suspended above the council chamber. The Sunburst was a representation of the political power that the people had invested in the councillors of City Hall in their Council Chamber.

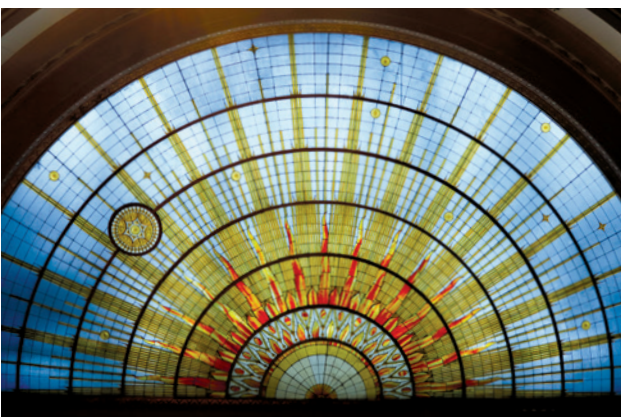


Figure 4: La Maitrise Pavillon, Paris 1925 Exhibition
Benton C., Benton T., and Wood G., 2003,
Art Deco 1910-1930. London: V&A Publications

Figure 5: The Sunburst Light in the Buffalo Masonic Consistory
Photo: Megan McElfresh, 2019

Figure 6: Blueprint of The Sunburst skylight design 1929
Photo: Bedson, 2019

Figure 7: The Sunburst skylight, City Hall, Buffalo
Photo: Bedson, 2019

These two installations are separated in time by 700 years. What does their history, therefore, tell us about the conservation process, and are differences in historical context likely to be more relevant to one window than the other? To start, let us consider the buildings in which they are housed. The Dean's Eye is part of an architectural Gothic masterpiece—Lincoln Cathedral—and conservation must reflect this. Because of its age, the glass must be preserved at all costs, or only replaced with medieval type glass if necessary. However, this has not always been the case: throughout its 800-year history there has been substantial deterioration of the glasswork. The level to which this has occurred must be studied meticulously to help match any preservation necessity with a suitable intervention. What is authentic? Newer panels installed in the 19th century were not historically correct. The conservator needs to be aware of these facts to pursue faithful preservation.

However, the history of The Sunburst only tells us that it is an Art Deco window completed in 1931. There is no record of who conceived or constructed it. To investigate its history further I visited City Hall in Buffalo and spoke to the current City Senior Architect (Brian Swartz), who is responsible for the building's maintenance and preservation, and examined The Sunburst skylight in person. Then, I spoke with Cynthia Van Ness, Director of Libraries and Archives for the Buffalo History Museum and examined the original blueprints for City Hall which had not been opened since 1932.

From these visits I was able to determine that one of the likely designers involved in The Sunburst was the architect John Wade himself. Firstly, The Sunburst theme is an original Art Deco concept that originated from the 1925 Paris Expo where a sunburst stained glass window was used in one of the buildings [figure 4].

This Expo occurred when Wade was conceptualising his ideas for the Art Deco City Hall. Secondly, he was also the architect for the Buffalo Masonic Consistory in the mid-1920s. Built before City Hall, it has a stained glass Tiffany Sunburst electric light, similar in design

to City Hall's Sunburst on the ceiling [figure 5]; it is now Canisius High School's auditorium. Finally, the blueprints of Wade's plans revealed an architecturally accurate drawing of The Sunburst skylight [figure 6 and 7]. John Wade was the architect, these are his drawings so it seems clear he was involved in the design as well.

It seems possible that within the timeframe I examined, John Wade would have reached out to the Tiffany Glass Studios in New York City, where Louis Comfort Tiffany—one of the foremost innovators in stained glass design—still worked. Because of their previous collaboration, geographic proximity, and the two Sunbursts' design equivalence (electric light and skylight), it is possible that between the two men The Sunburst was devised. Historically, this is an important assumption, since the methods used in Tiffany Glass production were peculiar to their studio and the innovations that they introduced, such as using copper Comes, were integral to the construction of The Sunburst. This would also make The Sunburst a Tiffany masterpiece, but no record of this association exists.

This history is important to the conservator. If this is a Tiffany window, the glass was made in a way peculiar to them, and any conservation would depend on this.

Clearly the historical context of the two windows is fundamental to the conservator's work, and a thorough understanding of this background is needed in planning any process of preservation.

CONSERVATION WITHIN THE TECHNOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Let us now consider the technology used in manufacturing the two windows and how this influences conservation practice. The Dean's Eye used medieval expertise and conservation relates mainly to the material degradation of its glass, lead Comes, ferramenta (supporting iron work), and stone tracery.

The Medieval stained glass used in the Dean's Eye is known as "Forest glass," so called because it used ash for flux, and charcoal for heat in its production from

forest trees such as Beech. It is very susceptible to surface erosion and paint loss because of errors in its application [figure 8]. The paint was made with finely ground glass mixed with metallic oxides, flux (potash) and Gum Arabic (a fixing agent). After painting, it was fired again. If too much flux was added this created a soft enamel which dissolved on contact with moisture. If underfired, the enamel did not bond with the glass and again is affected by moisture. If overfired the enamel would develop pitting in which moisture could sit. Exposure to the weather led to further surface erosion. Eight hundred years of weathering was followed by hyperhydration of the glass surface and rapid drying after storage in humid conditions during World War II, which led to fissuring on the surface [figure 9]. Degradation was mainly external, but internally accumulated grime was problematic. This was aggravated by the window's inaccessibility due to its height, and lack of cleaning.

Early conservation of The Dean's Eye used corrosive cleaning chemicals that were not thoroughly removed. These caused damage to the enamel from the initial chemical attack, and left remnants that continued to make surface pitting worse.

Preservation of the Dean's Eye relies on techniques appropriate to the damage. Minimal intervention was employed, including cloth, soft and bristle brushes for general cleaning, scalpel and air abrasion for accretions and external damage. White spirit was used to remove grease. Where glass was lost, glass inserts were used but distressed to be faithful to the original. To carry out reinstatement of the painted detail, radiography was used to reveal the image of the enamelling retained below the glass surface. X-rays reveal remaining traces of metal oxides within the glass. This allowed painting of a new copy of the image onto a backing plate and placed onto the reverse side of the original medieval glass.

Let us now consider how the technology of the 1920s might affect preservation of The Sunburst. In the late 19th century the technology of stained-glass making changed dramatically. Louis Comfort Tiffany led this

revolution, developing several new techniques. One new form was an opalescent glass that had a milky opaque appearance and when illuminated would exhibit a rainbow effect found nowhere else. His other great advance was Favrile glass, derived from the old English word "fabrile" (hand-wrought), which consisted of two sets of coloured glass folded into each other during manufacturing producing a more naturalistic finish that could be used for natural elements in a glass landscape. However, we do not know if these new technologies were used in The Sunburst as there is no historical record to substantiate this. I therefore examined The Sunburst in City Hall. There are qualities in the glass that distinctly resemble Favrile glass [figure 10]. In the Sunburst flames we can see the subtle effects of colouring and grain created by glass craftsmen shaping hot glass into folds, mixing several colours together to create a streaky or striated effect.

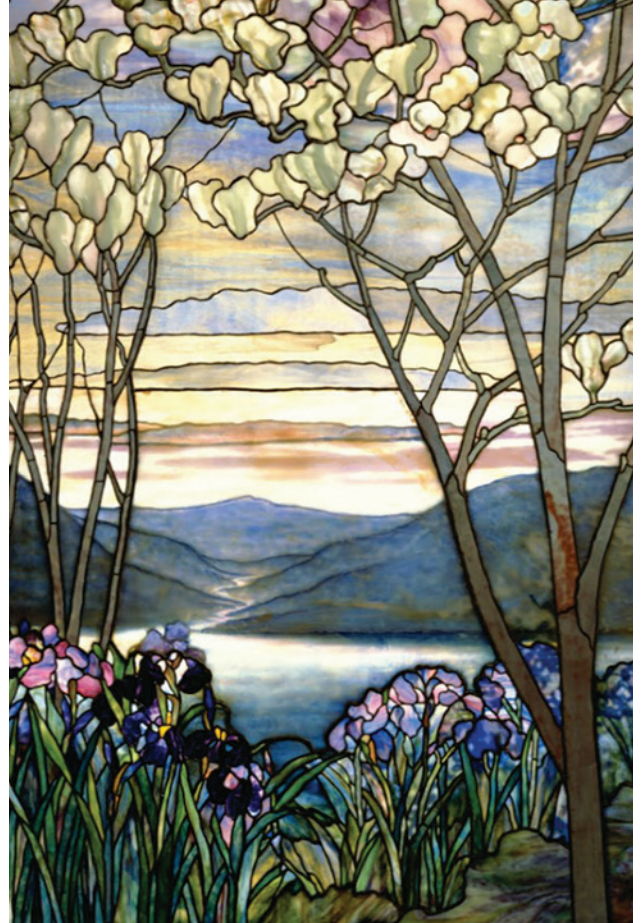
Figure 11 shows the upper reverse side of the glass and clearly shows that the striated and streaky effect is within the glass material rather than enamelled to one side. Though it was not possible to examine the glass with any current material analysis, the overall impression was that the glass was Favrile with some opalescent pieces [figure 12]. The glass was, however, covered in dust since it appears that it has never been cleaned since installation.

The principles of conservation in the Dean's Eye equally apply to the Sunburst except that it was not painted with enamel. Pressed glass is, however, just like any other and vulnerable to the effects of moisture, weathering and poorly employed cleaning techniques. However, the only visible issue when I examined the skylight pertained to dust and dirt accumulation on the upper

Figure 8: Loss of paint is evident in the central panel of the Dean's Eye
Photo: Lincoln Cathedral Stained Glass Conservation Department, 2019

Figure 9: Original Dean's Eye stained glass showing pitting, linear fissures and lead strap repair in the middle
Photo: Bedson, 2019

Figure 10: **Magnolias and Irises**, 2019
Designed by Louis Comfort Tiffany



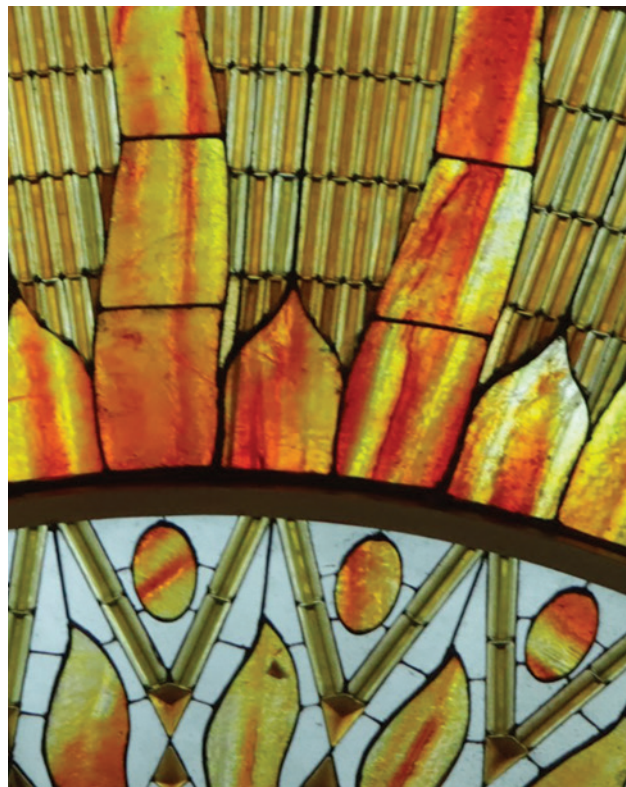
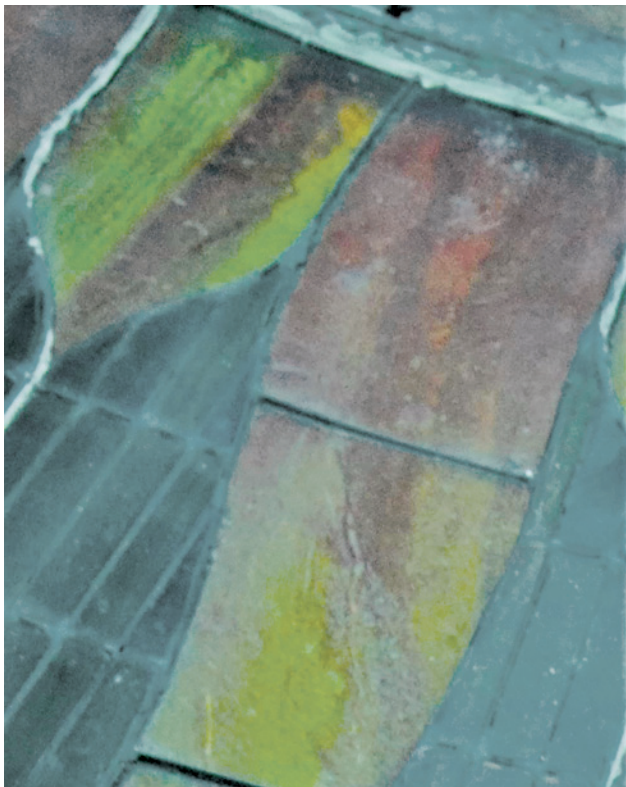


Figure 11: The Sunburst's flames seen from above revealing the same streaky/striated effect of two or more-coloured glasses folded together
 Figure 12: Sunburst flames demonstrating the streaky/striated effect of two or more-coloured glasses likely to have been folded together
 Photos: Bedson, 2019

surface of the skylight. Moisture damage was not evident from a visual inspection and is less likely to occur due to the building of a protective canopy over the window when it was installed.

Secondly let us consider the lead Cames. In the Dean's Eye, the medieval impure lead became fatigued over time and equally suffered from weathering. When in contact with soft acids in water such as carbon dioxide, the lead tends to dissolve into lead hydroxide and lead carbonate. This weakens its structure, and under the weight of the window and external air pressure from wind, the lead deforms. If allowed to continue this leads to damage of the window's shape. Additionally, over time, lead was used in glass repairs, thereby decreasing translucency.

Half of the weakened lead was therefore removed during the early 21st century restoration. Glass panels were resorted using resins rather than lead, particularly around facial and bodily features resulting in increased clarity.

Tiffany also developed the use of copper Cames. This produces very thin joints in the Cames which are typical in The Sunburst [figure 11] when compared to traditional leading. This was achieved using Tiffany's new technique employing copper foil, covered on one side in beeswax, and the other muriatic acid. The beeswax stuck the copper Cames to the glass and the muriatic acid allowed solder to join the copper strips on the glass together, thus resulting in a strong and much thinner join. It seems, therefore, that two important Tiffany technologies were used in its manufacture. The Sunburst shows no signs of copper Came degradation from visual inspection.

Thirdly there is the supporting framework for each window. One of the biggest threats to stained glass is the deterioration of the structure that holds it in place. Apart from the lead, there are iron work frame members in the Dean's Eye that consist of circular frames to hold the glass panels, 19th-century "saddle bars" behind these to support it, and large cross-bracing frames to hold the larger panels in place. All have decayed through corrosion over time. The stone tracery



Figure 13: Semi-circular steel bands can be seen supporting the Sunburst above the council chamber in City Hall; Photo: Bedson, 2019

that makes up the structure can also fracture. This was very common in the Rose Window before conservation was carried out. When stone fails it must be replaced. In the early 2000s this was done by Lincoln Cathedral stonemasons having removed the window completely due to near collapse of the whole structure.

The supporting steel work in The Sunburst would have been made using the Bessemer process to remove impurities making it extremely strong. The window is suspended on a set of seven semi-circular steel bands [figure 13]. This steel has a high carbon content and low level of impurities making it less likely to rust. With immense strength and less susceptibility to rusting, the steel in the Sunburst allowed it to be suspended horizontally above the council chamber. These semi-circular bands are in turn supported by a web of steel struts above the window [figure 14]. Further protection against rusting was provided by “red lead and oil paint” on all steel supports ordered by John Wade.

Finally, the addition of the protective canopy sheltered the steel from the weather. With the steel metalwork,

red lead paint, and its protective shell, the technology of the 20th century ensures the structural integrity of The Sunburst for some considerable time and indeed it shows no sign of deterioration within its metalwork or fixing to the steel and concrete work. However, though protected from outside, the humidity in the room is not known and it is possible that changes in the building’s internal and external temperature might lead to condensation and subsequent glass degradation. No air conditioning is employed in the canopy, which is like a garden greenhouse. There is simply an extractor fan for when it becomes too hot in summer. Nevertheless, the protective canopy has been very effective in protecting the window from moisture and pollution and in a reverse of conservation practices across the ages, such a protective cover has now also been implemented for The Dean’s Eye.

Clearly the time of manufacture plays a great part in the conservation issues that exist in these two windows, from the materials used to employment of a protective screen.



Figure 14: The Sunburst strut support for the steel bands; Photo: Bedson, 2019

CONSERVATION WITHIN THE ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

The work of the medieval craftsmen who created The Dean's Eye was not necessarily a true reflection of their own artistic expression. In fact, the Church dictated the religious doctrine they were required to use in their work. Accordingly, the theme of The Dean's Eye is the Last Judgement, the second coming of Christ normally composed of five scenes. However, one scene is missing, the separation of souls by St. Michael. It is thought that the newer panels were inserted to repair damage where this previously existed.

The Church determined the religious message, but the depiction of this was composed by the craftsmen. They were influenced by well-known manuscripts of

the time such as Guthlac's Roll which records the adventures of Saint Guthlac made at the Benedictine Crowland Abbey in Lincolnshire. The 1850s replacement of window panels in The Dean's Eye compromised the Church's original religious message. Conserving the integrity of The Dean's Eye's message regarding the Last Judgement is imperative. Therefore, future conservation must consider not only the religious doctrine and remain as true to this as possible, but also the sources of inspiration that motivated the artisans who made the window.

John Wade who designed Buffalo City Hall, and I believe The Sunburst, too, was heavily influenced by Art Deco. As in Art Deco the celebration of lines, and repetitive use of symmetrical shapes to create patterns are evident

in the window as evidenced by the linearity in the rays of light that radiate outwards from the red and yellow flames of the sun though the blue sky to the rim of the window. Future conservation must pay reference to this styling as it is the essence of the building, and to work outside these parameters would corrupt the designer's original concept. Considering the use of Favrite glass, this innovation of Tiffany is peculiar to this era and would appear to be at the heart of The Sunburst. The conservator must understand how the glass was used artistically to create the flame-like illusion if any remedial work is needed in the future.

The Sunburst is a representation of political power overshadowing the elected representatives to scrutiny from above. It symbolically casts light upon the governmental decisions taken. The celestial bodies remind them of their place in the order of things.

Clearly art and culture mix closely in the design of The Sunburst, and as with The Dean's Eye, the cultural significance of the whole must be understood with respect to any prospective conservation necessity.

CONCLUSION

Viewing these masterpieces across time gives chronological perspective to the conservation of stained glass. The medieval Dean's Eye suffers from the ravages of time, making it susceptible to deterioration because of the technology of the era. While its basic form is paused in the time at the point it was made, it has imprinted on it the historical change, and the influences of art and cultural variation over the 800 years of its existence. The Sunburst, in relative terms, is of recent construction, a technological product of the 20th century. Potentially a Tiffany masterpiece, it was also influenced by the art, culture and history of its time. We can predict its long-term conservation needs by reviewing those of The Dean's Eye, and clearly if these are not addressed, this will inevitably lead to damage. Though its construction is clearly more robust compared with the Dean's Eye, it remains susceptible to glass erosion through moisture exposure, glass stress due to loss of flexibility in the copper Cames, rusting

and dirt accumulation, which is already an issue. The canopy has afforded much protection from these issues, but with no monitored climate control, questions remain regarding the long-term stability of the skylight. Perhaps it is time to plan for the Sunburst's future, because if we don't, the next 800 years may not be as kind as the 800 the Dean's Eye has already endured.

Amelia J. Bedson is currently studying for an MA in Conservation of Cultural Heritage at Lincoln University in the U.K.. As part of her BA studies she worked within Lincoln Cathedral's stained glass department of restoration. She gained first-hand experience of conserving medieval glass and became fascinated with the long-term effects of time on stained glass degradation and the influences of technology, history, art and culture on this process. ■

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