Medieval Glass: The Influence of Three Great Bishops
by Julie Adams

Although only a tiny fraction remains of the original medieval glazing of our Cathedral, it is nevertheless one of our great treasures, and we are much indebted to our predecessors for the vision they had when they made plans to enhance the building.

The largest concentration we have of surviving medieval glass in Winchester is to be found in the presbytery clerestory and great east window, and this is the glass which will be conserved with money raised by the Friends’ Glass Appeal. Our medieval glass dates from three distinct periods which coincide with the bishoprics of William of Wykeham (1367 - 1404), William of Waynflete (1447 - 1486) and Richard Fox (1501 - 1528). Each of them took up their positions at a comparatively young age, and reached octogenarian status, so managed to serve a long term. Between them they covered a period of just over 100 years, but their tenures were not consecutive.

The original west window is thought to date from c. 1380, and William of Wykeham left sufficient money (500 marks) in his will to complete the glazing of the nave, and significantly more to complete the building work. Using one method of computing and comparing values, 500 marks could equate to four times as much as the current Cathedral Appeal for £20.5 million, so we can imagine how far Wykeham’s bequest would have gone to beautifying the building.

![Fig 1 Angel peeping out from a balcony - part of Wykeham’s glazing of the nave, Photo: Julie Adams](image)

Almost nothing of that original nave scheme remains in situ, although there are a few pieces of glass, possibly still in their original positions, which show angels peeping out from balconies in the tracery. (fig.1) Originally, individual figures appeared in each panel, under architectural canopies, and all around the nave clerestory there was a scheme of seraphim on wheels, just one of which survives, restored, and incorporated into the top of the Chamberlayne Macdonald window in the north nave aisle. (fig. 2) The very fine image of St Genevieve of Paris which is the principal subject of this window was originally part of Wykeham’s glazing in the north nave clerestory. (fig. 3). A few surviving saints and bishops as well as reconstructed figures from the north nave aisle can now be found in the five easternmost lights of the north presbytery clerestory.
Some further glazing continued during the bishopric of Waynflete. The scheme in the presbytery clerestory dates from c.1450 to 1460. It was similar in style to the nave, with single figures under architectural canopies. Images of saints were placed on the south side and prophets on the north. Only prophets now remain and a few of these were moved to the south side in 1834. The use of seraphim on wheels was also extended into the presbytery scheme, and there are several examples on the north side. (fig. 4)
When Richard Fox was installed as Bishop of Winchester (1501 - 1528) he had already held the Sees of Exeter, Bath and Wells, and Durham. It was during his tenure in Winchester that the great east window was inserted, in the 1520s. (fig. 5) This was much altered in 1850 to 1852 when it was conserved by Edward Baillie, and until now, it has not been clear how much of the original glass remained. Fox was also responsible for the insertion of glass in the north and south presbytery aisles which showed The Joys of Mary. Fox’s motto “Est Deo Gracia”, (God is Grace), appears frequently. Fox is known to have had some input into organising the glorious glass at Kings College Chapel, in his role as an executor to Henry VII. He was also involved with the complete cycle of medieval glass.
still extant at St Mary’s, Fairford in Gloucestershire, and his portrait appears there as St Mark in the Evangelists’ window (fig 6).

William of Wykeham founded New College, Oxford in 1379 (fig. 7) and Winchester College in 1382. (figs. 8 and 9) He felt that his success in life was due to his own excellent education at the hands of the monks of St Swithun’s Priory. His intention was that students would pass through Winchester College and then New College before entering the church. Both Winchester College and New College are more fortunate than the Cathedral in having a large part of their original glass intact. The story of the glass at Winchester College is a complicated one, but some of the original glass was returned there via two separate routes, after replacement glass had been substituted by Betton and Evans during their “restoration” in the 19th century. The medieval glass at both institutions is of a very high quality and we can only imagine what a masterpiece we might have if all our early glass was still extant.
William of Waynflete was an unusual choice of Bishop, as his background had been in school teaching. At the age of 30 he became Head Master of Winchester College, where he attracted the attention of the then Bishop of Winchester, Cardinal Beaufort who nominated him as his successor. Eventually he was introduced to Henry VI, and in 1442, William Waynflete was appointed Provost of Henry VI’s famous foundation at Eton. Here in Eton College Chapel, he commissioned the cycle of wall paintings of The Legends of The Blessed Virgin Mary which predate those commissioned by Prior Silkstede in our Lady Chapel. In 1448, he founded his own college, Magdalen Hall in Oxford, later to become Magdalen College (fig. 10) which has especially beautiful grounds occupying 100 acres. In addition, he founded two Grammar schools, one at his birthplace, Wainfleet in Lincolnshire, an early brick building, and the other attached to Magdalen in Oxford. Sadly, the pre-reformation glass at Magdalen College no longer exists.
Richard Fox founded Corpus Christi College on a much smaller site in Oxford in 1517. (fig. 11) He decided that it should be a place of Renaissance learning for the education of young men in the humanities and the sciences, and they would not just study Latin and Theology. He introduced Greek so that the students could read the work of Greek Philosophers. His students would be encouraged to think for themselves, and that would be a useful asset at a time when The Reformation was about to bring religious change. No medieval glass survives in Corpus Christi Chapel.

All three men were immensely rich; the See of Winchester provided an enormous income, the highest in the Kingdom, and this made it possible for the Bishops to be philanthropic. They were great patrons of the Arts, and both William of Wykeham and Richard Fox had previous experience of building; Wykeham was at one time chief keeper and surveyor of four castles - at Windsor, Leeds, Dover and Hadleigh, and Fox was responsible for redesigning the water defences at Calais. Due to their position as Bishops of Winchester, they were all Prelates of the Order of the Garter. William of Wykeham was a Royal Councillor to Edward III, and Richard Fox to Henry VII. Waynflete was a trusted advisor to Henry VI particularly in the setting up of Eton and Kings College, Cambridge. Both Wykeham and Fox went on to become Keeper of the Privy Seal, and both Wykeham and Waynflete were given the post of Chancellor of England. Frequently Bishops had diplomatic roles and administrative roles quite apart from their clerical roles within their dioceses.

Wykeham fell from royal favour and he was accused of having mismanaged the royal policy whilst Chancellor. He was eventually given a royal pardon, but after that he took a less active role in politics. Waynflete resigned his position of Chancellor of England before the battle of Northampton, one of the major battles during the Wars of the Roses. He had of course been closely allied with Henry VI and remained more politically detached during the reign of Henry’s successor, Edward IV. He too had a royal pardon and later Edward IV made him a godfather to his youngest daughter, Bridget. Fox found himself
being overtaken by his friend Thomas Wolsey in Henry VIII’s affection, and he took on a less public role at the end of his life, devoting himself to his clerical duties. He became blind and after having had his chantry chapel built in the Cathedral, he spent much of his time within that confined space, in the tiny cell to the east.

An enduring legacy from our medieval Bishops lies in the existence of their chantry chapels. Wykeham’s was erected before his death at a position of his choosing. It is placed where as a boy on a regular basis, he used to assist one of the monks at mass. His tomb carries his coat of arms and is surrounded by the wording, “Here overthrown by death, lies William surnamed Wykeham. He was bishop of this church and repairer of it. He was unbounded in hospitality, as the rich and poor can easily prove. He was also an able politician and councillor of state. His piety is manifest by the colleges he founded. The first of which is at Oxford and the second at Winchester. You who behold this tomb, cease not to pray, that for such merits he may enjoy eternal life.” The effigy of Wykeham shows him finely dressed in his Bishop’s robes with two angels at his shoulders and three little figures, thought to be either his executors or his master craftsmen, at his feet.

Waynflete too had his chantry chapel built before his death. He chose a spot in the retroquire close to both the newly created shrine for St Swithun and the chantry chapel of his predecessor Henry Beaufort. For many, this is the most beautiful chantry chapel in Winchester with its intricate carving and unusual details such as the tiny snail above the entry door on the north side. (fig. 12) Lilies are present in his coat of arms, which was adopted by Magdalen, and the lilies also appear in the badge of Eton. Waynflete’s much restored effigy shows him in full pontifical robes with his heart held in his hands.

Fox’s chantry is covered with his emblem of the pelican in piety, and built to a design approved by him during his lifetime. Fashions had changed, so his chantry bears an image of a cadaver or corpse, as a memento mori, reminding us all that everyone is reduced to the same state at death, no matter how important they have been in their lifetimes. The vaulting (fig.13) and the frieze surmounting the reredos are richly coloured and gilded, and form some of the most exquisite decoration to be found in the Cathedral.

When the presbytery glass returns to the Cathedral, conserved for future generations, we shall have even more reason to appreciate the extent to which some of our early Bishops contributed to the fabric and embellishment of our Cathedral. This they achieved at the
same time as ensuring that they had made careful provision for their educational institutions in Oxford.

Sources:-

Online Oxford Dictionary of National Biography 2014/15
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