

BATH AND WELLS DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

GUIDANCE NOTES ON STAINED GLASS

INTRODUCTION: WHY A NEW STAINED GLASS WINDOW?

Although many churches are enhanced by beautiful stained glass windows, a proposal to introduce new stained glass must be very carefully considered before being pursued. In the words of Stephen Dykes Bower: "Stained glass is intrinsically linked with architecture. There must be first a building to contain it: that creates the setting it should beautify. Union of the two must be such that each helps the other to give delight and thus earn even more affection."

When considering a proposal, applicants should start by asking and satisfactorily answering for themselves the following questions:-

- Is the change to the fabric of the building justified? (What will the proposed glass replace?)
- Will the proposed window embellish the church? Will it complement existing windows?
- In the case of a memorial window the design of which is intended to commemorate a person or event, is that person or event worthy of such a memorial? (Such a memorial should be regarded as a special privilege, reserved for very exceptional cases. The window should in any event be primarily to the glory of God.)

Alternative forms of memorials, such as items of furniture should be considered and are positively encouraged by the Committee.

"The art of manipulating coloured light within an architectural context"

In a paper produced for the Council for the Care of Churches, stained glass is described as a technical art form in which the formal and expressive elements of design are combined with the disciplines of a craft. The history of the medium is one of continual innovation based on an ancient tradition, exploring new approaches to the raw materials of glass, lead and paint and new means of relating art to architecture.

The CCC paper continues by stating that no art can be confined by rigid stylistic or other criteria but a few guiding principles are probably useful in assessing a stained glass design commissioned for a church. These principles are best defined in the form of the following questions:

1. Why commission a stained glass window rather than some other art form? Would a well designed leaded light be preferable to a fully coloured window?
2. Whether the design is figurative or abstract, does it fully exploit the potential of the medium, the specific qualities of the materials and techniques available, or is it simply a picture placed within an architectural frame?

3. How far has the designer considered the specific position of the window? If the window is in a south or west facing wall where it will receive especially direct light, has this been taken into consideration in the colouring, the quality of the glass painting and the thickness of the leads etc? Has due attention been given to the effects of light within the building eg any clear or light coloured windows directly opposite which might produce reflected light on the window's inner surface? How transparent will the window be in relation to features, such as trees, gravestones, monuments etc outside the building and has the designer taken account of these?
4. What effect will the window have on the overall lighting within the church and how will it relate, in terms of colouring and design, to any existing stained glass or other features, eg sculpture or architectural carving in its vicinity
5. Does the iconography of the design have validity as, in the words of one contemporary artist, a "long term image"? If the window is to be in a prominent position, does it have some discernible spiritual significance or does it depict/express simply topical or ephemeral themes?
6. Will the completed window be weather tight? Will the design be executed by a competent craftsman with the necessary experience to ensure that the window will be properly glazed and cemented?
7. Does the design include the supporting saddle bars, which should be more than 30-35 cm apart and of a suitable non-ferrous metal?
8. Will there be liaison between the person fixing the window and the church architect/surveyor about the type of mortar to be used and the installation of the saddle bars, so as to avoid any damage to the window's stonework?

It is of course true that adherence to guiding principles will not, of itself, guarantee a masterpiece, but in stained glass the most effective results are achieved where the artist's inspiration embodies the practical considerations of location, architectural unity, structural soundness etc.

BEFORE MAKING AN APPLICATION FOR NEW STAINED GLASS

The PCC, whether or not it is formally the applicant, should first:

1. **Obtain expert assessment of the value of the existing glass both of itself and in relation to other adjacent windows or the architectural scheme.** Most stained glass, of whatever age, has artistic merit although its qualities may vary considerably. It should be remembered that much old plain glass has historic importance as well. Only when this rigorous test has been passed should the applicant consider pursuing a commission.
2. **Exercise great care in choosing an artist and should see examples of the proposed artist's work before any consideration of commissioning.**

It is vital that the artist's work is thought to be of relevance to the building and the subject to be depicted.

3. **It is essential to consult the Archdeacon and the church architect at an early stage. The DAC should also be consulted for preliminary informal advice before the artist is invited to submit a final design.**

MAKING AN APPLICATION

1. A good quality drawing of the proposed window should be submitted with the application for preliminary informal advice and it should be an accurate representation of what the proposed window will look like.
2. The existing window or lights should be accurately drawn to scale showing the correct profiles of cusps, curved heads etc.
3. The small scale or large scale cartoon should show the leading properly drawn and to an accurate and realistic size.
4. The method of support should be clearly described ie external or internal ferramenta, stanchions, saddle bars etc. It is vital that the relationship of the design of the window proposed should relate to the ferramenta which is a vital component of stained glass design.
5. Photographs of the existing window (close up and in context with the interior) and of the adjacent windows should be submitted with the application to enable the proposals to be considered in context.

REPAIRS TO STAINED GLASS

Often retaining and repairing the existing stained glass will be the most appropriate course of action. Too often when considering the repair of glass the condition of the stone tracery and its attendant wrought ironwork is disregarded. Medieval tracery frequently required extensive repair in order to prevent exfoliation and decay of stonework and this can be equally true of 19th century stonework or post medieval repairs where the quality or choice of stone may leave something to be desired. Nevertheless tracery and moulded work containing the glass should always be repaired and conserved hand in hand with glazing repairs and this will have considerable budgetary implications. A conservator-mason should be approached just as one would approach a glazier.

PROTECTION OF STAINED GLASS

At the same time as making an application to instal a new stained glass window, it is advisable also to consider what (if any) protective measures are to be taken to safeguard the new window and to include those proposals (if any) in the same application for preliminary informal advice or faculty approval. Applicants are advised to read the DAC paper entitled "Church Window Guards – a Review of Common Types" .

November 2000