

IV.

MEDIÆVAL STAINED GLASS RECENTLY RECOVERED FROM THE
RUINS OF HOLYROOD ABBEY CHURCH. BY F. C. EELES,
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The fragments of mediæval stained glass about to be described were found on the top of the vaulting of the south aisle of the nave of Holyrood Abbey Church during repairs to the roof in 1909. They have since been carefully cleaned and set up to form part of a window at the east end of the picture gallery. Their discovery is of first-class importance to Scottish ecclesiastical archæology, because hardly any stained glass has survived from mediæval Scotland.

A ROUGH SKETCH OF THE HISTORY OF STAINED GLASS.

Before describing the Holyrood glass in detail, it will perhaps be as well to run over, very briefly, the history and development of mediæval stained glass, as a glance at the main points may make it easier to realise the exact position and relation of the newly recovered Holyrood fragments.

The ornamentation of glass vessels by means of colour was practised by the Romans as well as other ancient nations, and the decoration of a large surface by means of a number of pieces of coloured glass or glazed material carefully fitted together was also well known, but the principle was not applied to windows, although the glazing of windows with plain glass was known to the Romans, for window glass is found in almost every Roman fort. In the middle of the seventh century, Benedict Biscop brought glass workers from Gaul to glaze the windows of his churches at Wearmouth and Jarrow, and as church architecture progressed during what is called the Romanesque period, methods of window glazing also underwent a corresponding development.

Coloured glass, arranged in patterns after the manner of a mosaic, was commonly employed in churches before the eleventh century, and the further development of foliage and figure work must have followed very quickly, for all our evidence goes to show that stained glass as we know it, though in its earliest form, was the rule for a great and rich church at the beginning of the Norman period in our island, and that it had been in use on the Continent for some time previously. As a decorative art, the staining of glass probably arose in Gaul.

Early glass was very thick, and the pieces were small. The lead-

work in which it was set and the ironwork that supported it had to be strong and plentiful. From the first, both leading and ironwork were so arranged as to have a distinct decorative value. The glass

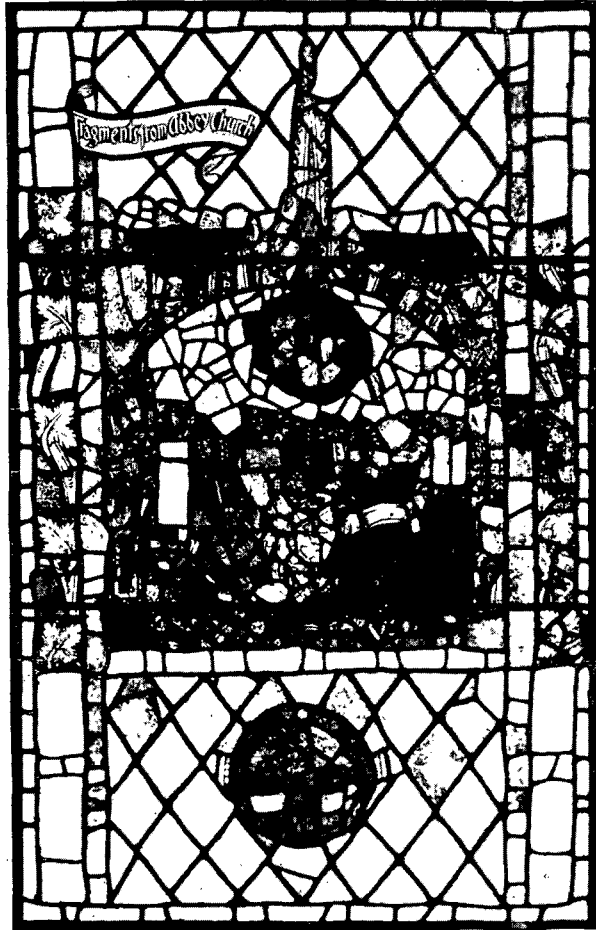


Fig. 1. Central part of window at east end of picture gallery at Holyrood Palace, showing fragments of stained glass refixed for preservation.

was placed in medallions of various forms, and the windows were divided into corresponding sections by the supporting ironwork. The heavy leadwork was carefully utilised to outline and emphasise the figures, ornaments, or groups.

The glass was coloured all through in the making; it was what is

called "pot-metal" glass; only in the case of red was there any difference in manufacture, and that was "flashed," a thin red coating being spread by a blow-pipe over a sheet of white glass. All the glass was thick and



Fig. 2. Fragments of ancient glass found at Holyrood.

full of bubbles, but irregular in thickness. These characteristics, coupled with the wavy surface, broke up and refracted the light in such a way as to produce those extraordinarily rich and brilliant colour effects which are so noticeable in early glass.

In glass of the Norman period, such as still exists in France and to some extent in England, as at Canterbury and York, the designs of

the windows consisted of small, and somewhat thin and angular figures in groups, set in medallions. The backgrounds were of plain glass, usually red or blue.

Foliage was but sparingly used, and was nearly always of the stiff acanthus-leaf variety, so familiar in Norman stonework and in manuscript illuminations of the period.

With the thirteenth century came First Pointed or Early English architecture, and the introduction of the earliest forms of Gothic ornament. Figures were enlarged and improved, foliage was extensively used and made much more free and varied, though it still followed the conventional types which we know so well in books and carved stone. The medallions in which scenes were placed became more varied in form, and the larger figures were used singly in lancet windows and placed beneath simple canopies. While the backgrounds of scenes and figures continued to be of plain glass, the groundwork of the window as a whole, forming the spaces above or below medallions or niches, was treated with elaborate interlacing designs of branches and leaves, often most ingeniously arranged upon the lines of different geometrical figures. Sometimes this foliage groundwork was made wholly of white, or rather pale blue-green glass, the background of which was covered with cross hatching, throwing up into strong relief crisp and vigorous foliage of the characteristic First Pointed type. This kind of glass has a silvery-grey appearance at a distance and is known as grisaille. It is frequently used in clearstory windows.

Towards the end of the thirteenth century, as architectural forms became less severe, the canopies over single figures assumed a richer character, their arches were trefoiled and the containing gables crocketed. These arches and crockets were usually made of brilliant pot-metal yellow glass, which has a brassy appearance.

With the fourteenth century came the introduction of large traceried windows, which provided a wider field for the glazier. The early years of the same century also saw the discovery of what is known as "yellow stain," caused by the application of chloride of silver to white glass, by the use of which a pale yellow could be produced, giving a lighter and altogether different effect from that of the heavy, brassy, pot-metal yellow, and the colour could also be applied where necessary to a portion only of a piece of white glass, so as to produce another variety of decorative treatment. Figures were made larger, and a rich diaper on red or blue or sometimes green glass was used for their backgrounds. Scenes were placed in compartments under small canopies instead of in medallions. Glass became thinner, smoother, and less deep in colour. The most characteristic fourteenth-century development was the great

elaboration of the canopy over the single figure. The crocketed gable was increased in height, its crockets enlarged, and a wall-like background was provided, often embattled and otherwise enriched. The flanking pinnacles rose to a great height and were subdivided into smaller ones above, while additional pinnacles and gablets rose in the background. But the whole structure was depicted on the flat and without perspective. Grisaille work and foliage borders changed their character in accordance with the style of the time and became naturalistic. Oak leaves and acorns, ivy leaves and berries, take the place of the crisp and lumpy conventional foliage of the previous century. Grisaille backgrounds lose their geometrical character and consist of natural stems and leaves wandering about over a trellis-work of varied geometrical forms produced by the careful arrangement of the leadwork.

In the fifteenth century Perpendicular architecture overspread England and brought still larger windows and a new style of glass, of which the chief characteristic is an increased use of white and general lightness of colour. Canopies, whether over single figures or groups, became still more elaborate, were drawn in perspective, and usually made very white, conveying the impression of white stone. The brown enamel, hitherto laid on in mass and then scraped away to show the coloured design in relief, began to be applied in thin lines to make shading and outline patterns. Some of the colours changed; blues became more purple or much paler, reds more scarlet, yellows paler, and greens yellower. In general, there is a light and silvery appearance unknown before, and the figures and scenes become more and more realistic. Where there is a conventional background, the connected design of the old grisaille disappears, each quarry is treated separately and bears a conventional flower or an heraldic charge. The whole effect of these fifteenth-century backgrounds resembles that of what was called "powdering" in decorative work at the time.

The introduction of enamel painting (to be carefully distinguished from the single dark brown enamel hitherto used) in the sixteenth century brought a revolution in stained glass. Scenes began to be painted in different colours upon white glass. Hitherto, the various colours had been produced by the selection and arrangement of different pieces of coloured glass, the effect being helped out by enamel brown upon the glass, but not by the application of any colour except yellow stain upon white glass. This made it impossible to produce much minute detail except in strict subordination to a broad colour scheme. And as stained-glass windows depend for their effect upon such a colour scheme, the delicately painted medallions, the carefully shaded figures, and the overloaded detail of the new method proved to be the ruin of

the art as a whole. Very charming work was done in some of these early enamel-painted medallions, a type of glass peculiarly suited to domestic use, and some of the larger work of this kind has distinct merit along a line of its own. But it was vitiated by its artificiality. The old art of making the coloured glass, the material itself, tell the story, was true to the spontaneous spirit of the Gothic period. Whether of the earlier or later type, such work has brilliancy, effectiveness, and the subtle indefinable charm which belongs to the more natural and direct forms of art, that one instinctively feels to be lacking in even the best glass of the Renaissance. And the subsequent history of the enamel-painted window showed that it marked the decadence of glass painting.

ANCIENT GLASS IN SCOTLAND.

When we turn to Scotland we find a greater scarcity of old glass than in any other countries of Western Europe, except perhaps Ireland, Denmark, and Norway. It is distressingly easy to summarise what has survived.

I. *Fragments.*

(1) A considerable collection of small fragments at St Andrews, now in the Cathedral museum there, mostly in very brittle and decayed condition, and all very small, was found in the north transept. The few that have any ornament appear to belong to the first part of the thirteenth century, as they show the small, sharply pointed acanthus leaf commonly used in floral work at that time. Placed beside them are a few larger fragments from St Mary's at the Kirkheugh, some of which are of grisaille work of the usual late thirteenth-century type.

(2) At Coldingham Priory Church, Berwickshire, there are a few similar fragments of late thirteenth-century grisaille work and bordering, described and correctly illustrated in colour in the revised Report of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments for that county.

(3) In the National Museum this Society has a few small fragments from Dunfermline, Dunblane, Lindores, Iona, and Melrose. Of these, the Dunfermline fragments consist of grisaille work like that already referred to; some of those from Lindores seem to be the same; the Melrose fragment is a late scrap of red glass with three cross crosslets; and the rest are of indeterminate character.

(4) In the Smith Institute, Stirling, are a few small fragments from Cambuskenneth which I have not been able to examine, as the building is at present used for military purposes and the glass is inaccessible.

None of this glass is set up in window form, so as to be seen; until

the Holyrood glass was found, it was all the really mediæval glass known to have survived in Scotland. When it is pointed out that if it were all put together it would not amount to half what has been found at Holyrood, the importance of the Holyrood discovery will be realised.

Scotland possesses a little glass of the sixteenth-century heraldic type, namely:—

(5) In the Magdalen Chapel in the Cowgate, Edinburgh, are four fine heraldic roundels of the second quarter of the sixteenth century, reset in modern glass, but almost certainly still in the windows they originally occupied. These were carefully described and illustrated in colour in our *Proceedings* for 1886-7, vol. xxi. p. 266, by Mr George Seton, who considers that they must have been originally set up about 1545.

(6) In the chapel of Stobhall Castle, Perthshire, are considerable remains of heraldic glass of about the same time or a little later, together with fragments that may perhaps be earlier: these are described but not illustrated in our *Proceedings* for 1891-2, vol. xxvi. p. 34, by Mr J. M. Gray.

(7) At Fyvie Castle, a heraldic roundel dated 1599, and

(8) At Woodhouselee, a heraldic roundel dated 1600, both described in Mr Gray's paper already referred to.

II. *The Douglas Glass.*

Although neither of Scottish make nor a Scottish survival, the finest mediæval glass in Scotland cannot be passed over, for it would be remarkable anywhere. In the church of St Bride, Douglas, in Lanarkshire, are two windows, a large one of three lights and a small one of two, containing a great amount of early glass, some perhaps of the twelfth century, but mostly of the thirteenth. The principal subjects consist of the Blessed Virgin and the Holy Child, with the seated figure of King Hezekiah, taken no doubt from a window representing the Tree of Jesse. Two smaller groups represent SS. Peter and Paul, and SS. Simon and Bartholomew, under semicircular canopies, with scrolls bearing Lombardic inscriptions. There are medallions of the symbols of the four Evangelists and three circular floral medallions with the stiff leaf ornament common at the time. A large figure of St John the Evangelist, represented holding the chalice with the serpent flying out of it, belongs to the fifteenth century. The small two-light window contains thirteenth-century glass of a somewhat different character from the rest; in one light are two men in chain armour, in the other St Paul with his sword. No other church in Scotland can show the like, and although brought from elsewhere and fitted into these

windows in modern times, the glass is among the most interesting early glass in Britain, and is well worthy of careful description and illustration in detail and in the original colours.

III. *The Holyrood Glass.*

We are now in a position to appreciate the exact nature of the Holyrood discovery. While none of the pieces of glass are of very large size, a number of them are complete, several that were broken have been joined again, and others were originally adjacent. It has been possible to place many of the fragments in what were roughly their original relations, and there are enough to tell us very accurately the type of window from which they come. There are, in fact, fragments of the glass of two or more of the small lancet windows which at one time existed in the clearstory on the south side of the nave. One of these windows seems to have belonged to the end of the thirteenth century, another to the beginning of the fourteenth. The first of these is represented by several fragments of First Pointed grisaille work, some scraps of crocketing in rich pot-metal yellow, and one or two pieces of the drapery of a figure in the same yellow, and one or two pieces of drapery in green. Some green oak leaves, now placed in a medallion, and some plain red and blue background are also most probably of the earlier type. As there was a good deal of overlapping between the different kinds of work, it is possible that some of this glass may be a little later in date and of the same period as the next to be described.

The bulk of the coloured fragments belong to an early Decorated window, of the typical fourteenth-century type, with a large canopy over the figure and a foliage border all round. There is the top of a large pinnacle with cross-hatched shading in the middle and small crockets up the sides. There are pieces of panelling from the faces of the buttresses and shafts that supported the pinnacles. Several pieces of white cusping streaked with yellow stain belong to the arch over the figure, and some green background diapered with crescents, and other pieces outlined to represent stonework no doubt came from the embattled walls that were often combined with canopies of this class. Several beautiful pieces of deep ruby covered with a very characteristic wavy diaper pattern evidently formed part of the background of the figure beneath the canopy. A fragment of a crown may indicate that the figure represented one of the royal saints.

Perhaps the most striking of all the fragments are those which formed part of the foliage border which ran round the sides and arch

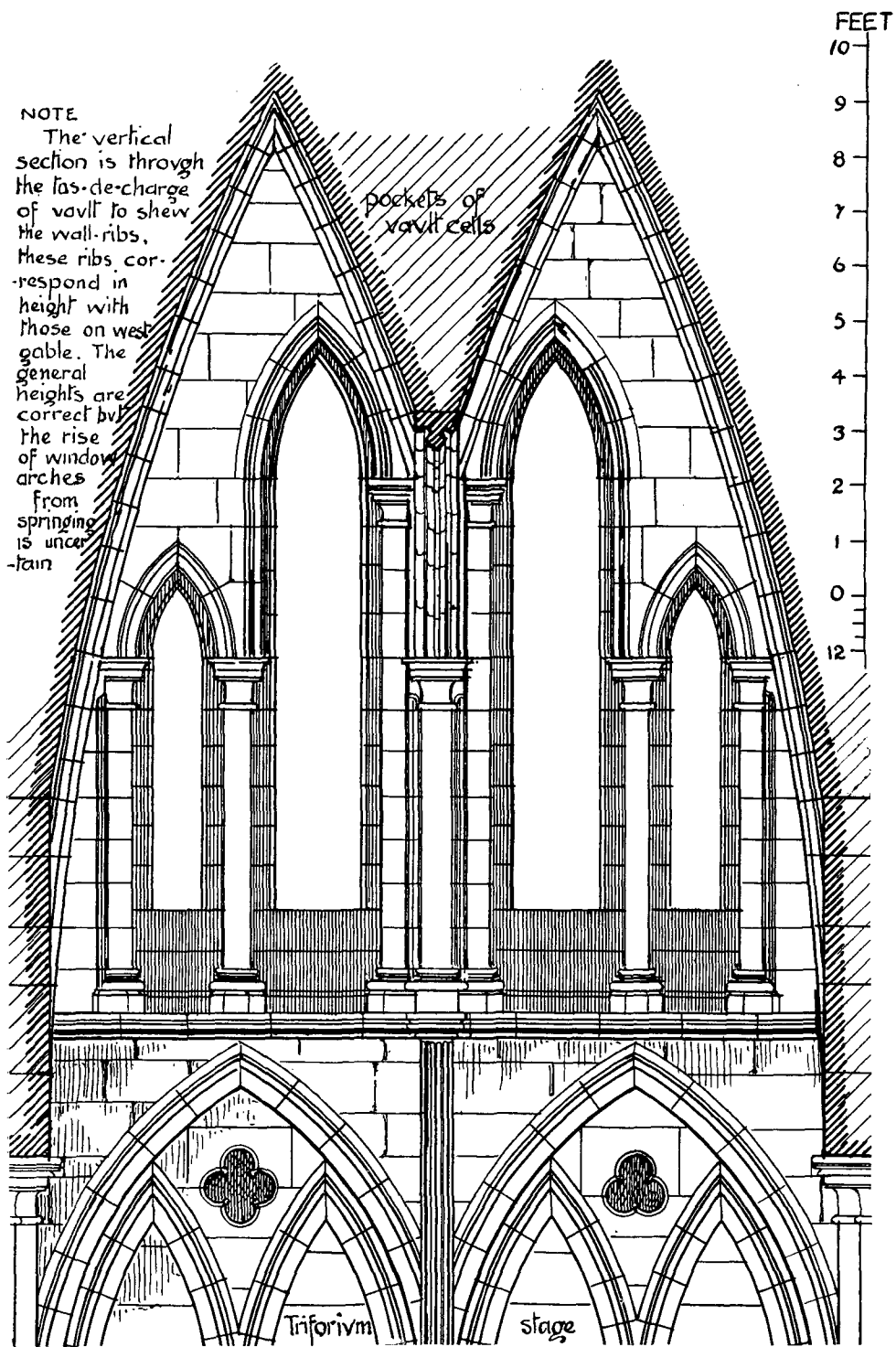


Fig. 3. Elevation of one bay of nave clearstory of Holyrood Abbey Church, reconstructed from existing remains, to show windows from which the glass came.

[Drawn by Mr John Watson.

of the window. Several of these are perfect, or have been so easily joined that it has been possible to set them up in their original form as vertical borders, a section on either side of the principal collection of fragments. They consist of a thick yellow stem branching on one side into a leaf of quadrangular form, not unlike that of the hawthorn, with plain green glass in the angle on the opposite side of the stem. This particular formula for a border is very characteristic of early fourteenth-century work, and occurs in different varieties, according to the plant represented.

One or two fragments—a white scrap with foliage painted on it in enamel brown, in the very late style, a small piece of greyish blue and another piece of blue with a particular kind of floral diaper on it—may perhaps have come from a fifteenth-century window.

Besides the coloured glass there are numerous pieces of plain white glass of the beautiful greenish shade and the great thickness characteristic of early work. Some of the more perfect of these are diamond-shaped, others rectangular. They evidently come from a window of plain glass, glazed, no doubt, in the thirteenth century, when the church was built. Other white fragments are of a different kind altogether, much thinner, much more level in surface, and of the kind common in later days. They are probably relics of repairs to windows made when the nave was restored in the time of Charles I.

Many other fragments were found, but not in a condition in which they could be used. The action of fire on the earth and rubbish in which they had lain buried on the top of the south aisle vault had rendered them opaque and slaty. Many more were mere splinters, and there was a large quantity of uselessly small fragments of the late plain glass which seems to belong to the seventeenth century.

Some time ago, under the direction of Mr Oldrieve, the present writer spent many weeks sorting, cleaning, and arranging the glass at the Office of Works, with the help of Mr Ritchie. When it was all cleaned, and arranged as far as possible in accordance with what could be ascertained of the original design, the fragments which were capable of being set up in leads to form part of a window were placed in the hands of Mr Douglas Strachan, the well-known artist in stained glass, who set them up in the form in which they are now, in a frame which Mr Oldrieve arranged to fit into the lower part of the window in the centre of the east end of the long picture gallery of Holyrood Palace, not many feet from the position they originally occupied. They now form the most important group of fragments of mediæval stained glass that has come down to us in Scotland from mediæval times, and

we owe a very great debt of gratitude to Mr Oldrieve for the effective steps he has taken to preserve them.

The questions now arise, Are these the remains of windows of Scottish manufacture, and if not, where did the glass come from? The answer to the first question is unfortunately in the negative, and the most probable answer to the second is the suggestion that they came from York. In the thirteenth century it must be remembered that nearly everything connected with the Scottish Church, or with building or art, came from England, and it is more than doubtful if a native school of glass painting could have developed here then. At that time, and for long afterwards, York was the great centre of glass painting for all the north of England. It would be the natural place to turn to. There is nothing whatever to distinguish the glass from English glass. A careful student of York glass, Miss M. Leaf, who is one of the best living authorities upon the glass of the north of England, has examined it all, and is of opinion that it was made there. The greater part of it is almost identical with glass of the same period still remaining in the York churches, especially the Minster; All Saints, North Street; St Denys, Walmgate; St Martin-cum-Gregory; St John, Ouse Bridge.

That the Holyrood canons should have patronised the York glaziers is most natural. Holyrood was colonised from Scone, and the Scone canons came from the great Yorkshire house of Austin canons at Nostell near Pontefract. That the Holyrood canons kept up a connection with English houses of the same order, we know from the manuscript Holyrood Ordinale belonging to Mr Moir Bryce, and now in the press for the Old Edinburgh Club, which contains an agreement between them and the canons of Carlisle regarding masses for deceased brethren.

In conclusion, the writer wishes to express his thanks to Miss Leaf for the enormous amount of time and trouble she has taken in going over the Holyrood glass and comparing it piece by piece with the glass at York; and also to Mr John Watson, who has made a special study of the structure of the Abbey Church, for the drawing (fig. 3) which reproduces a bay of the nave clearstory windows such as those for which the glass was made.