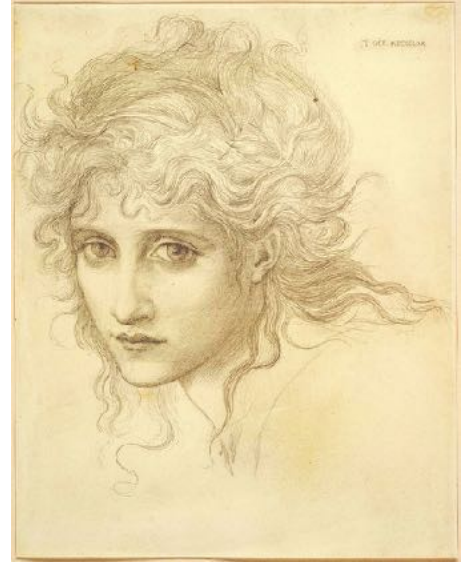


A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - No.1

Mike Deeming has kindly offered to contribute a regular piece on stories behind the Cathedral windows.

People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within - Elizabeth Kübler-Ross.

When you look at a painting depicting an unnamed person, as opposed to a portrait, it's tempting to surmise who is portrayed. I'm a fan of the artist Lydia Corbett, who, when studying art in Paris, became Picasso's muse as the 'Girl with the ponytail'.



But does the same happen with stained glass windows? Henry Holiday, who succeeded Edward Burne-Jones as chief designer at John Powell & Sons, was a leading designer of the 'Aesthetic Movement'. This movement built on the work of the Pre-Raphaelite artists and sought the ultimate in 'beauty', whether in fine art, literature or music. Holiday extended this approach to stained glass.



So when in 1880 he was invited by the children of Mary, Countess of Radnor to design a commemorative window depicting four Mary's and four Old Testament Holy women, it's not surprising that he turned to images of the women who had posed for so many pre-Raphaelite pictures. The windows (in the south quire aisle) show clear likenesses of Jane Morris (William Morris' wife), Fanny Cornforth (left) and Maria Zambaco (above). Maria Zambaco was a divorced mother who became Edward Burne-Jones mistress and tried to persuade him to share a suicide pact. Fanny Cornforth and Jane Morris were both mistresses of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. There's no evidence that Holiday was alluding to the biblical characters – he was concerned with portraying beauty.

The aesthetic movement flourished at the end of the nineteenth century, but after 1900 the frontiers of stained glass shifted to the Arts and Crafts movement, led by Christopher Whall. The Cathedral has a magnificent example of this type of window through which we will peek on another occasion.