

## A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - NO. 24

**MIKE DEEMING WRITES:**

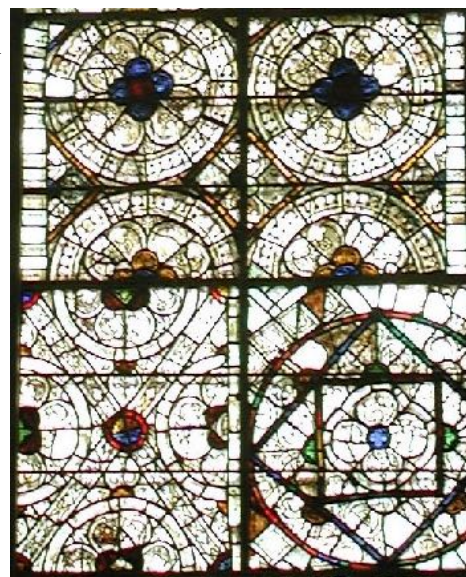
Surprisingly, Thomas à Becket and King Henry III stand alongside one another in the East window of the Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral, despite Becket having been murdered 37 years before Henry was born. Of course, by the mid C13, Henry was firmly established, albeit with the reduced powers enshrined in Magna Carta, the links with Rome had been re-built and Becket had been canonised. These superb windows were installed in 1896 and are the work of A O Hemming, one of the lesser-known Victorian stained-glass artists.



Alfred Octavius Hemming (1843-1907) trained as an architect in Edinburgh, then joined Clayton and Bell in 1868, before setting up his own firm A.O. Hemming & Co in 1883 in Cavendish Square, London. He was very much in the Gothic Revival tradition with outstanding use of colour and detailed design. This advert from a trade magazine in the 1890s mentions that he wasn't just involved in stained glass, but also in mural decoration in churches. His work can be found in many churches across England, in addition to the cathedrals of Canterbury, Ripon and Salisbury.



One of the first windows he made after setting up on his own is the 1884 memorial to George Arney in the North transept (see J&T 57) – and the Canterbury windows closely match this style. Later, in Salisbury, he was commissioned by Eleanor Hamilton, widow of Dean Hamilton, to restore and assemble the medieval grisaille found in the glaziers' workshop above the Trinity Chapel: these panels were installed in 1896 in the South windows of the SE transept (above the vestry) in 1896. This was so successful in demonstrating the incredible skill and artistry of the medieval glaziers and of Hemming himself that, on Eleanor's death, her daughter commissioned Hemming to totally reglaze the North windows of the North transept mirroring these medieval designs. This is a dramatic contrast to James Bell's south transept windows (installed as a memorial to Dean Hamilton) which copy some of the grisaille from the West end of the Cathedral. Standing at the crossing, the full impact of these amazing creations can be seen. I always ask visitors there which they prefer – by a short head, I would say that Hemming comes out better than Bell.



In Salisbury we are fortunate to have the widest range of medieval grisaille window designs in the country. We're indebted to A O Hemming for bringing these back to life. Hemming didn't have a maker's mark, but occasionally signed his work, as here in St Mary's Church, Farnham Royal.

