

A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - NO. 29

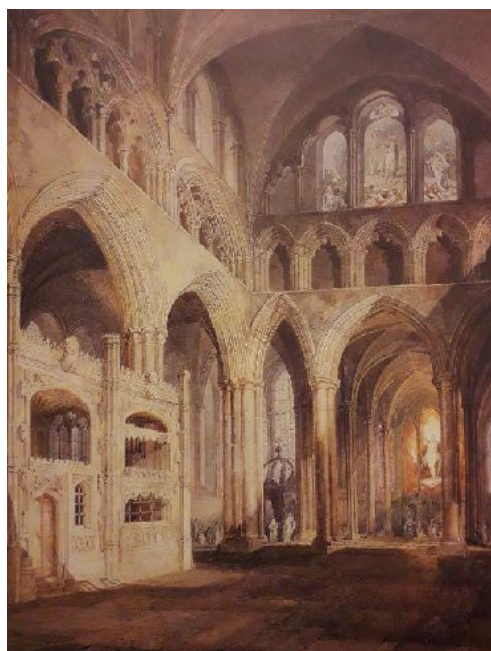
MIKE DEEMING WRITES:

One of the glories of the Cathedral is the Prisoners of Conscience window that creates a sense of calm in the Trinity Chapel and a sense of closure to the East end of the building. But what came before this window? Fortunately, records still show glimpses of the windows that graced the East end back to 1790.

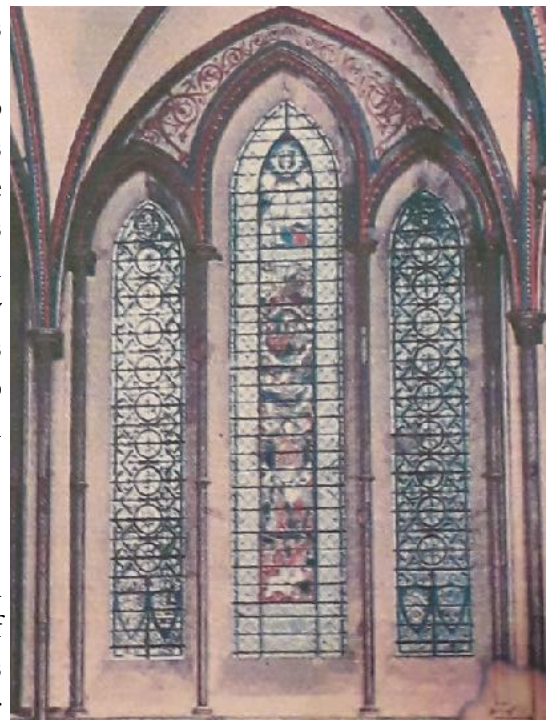
Sir Joshua Reynolds had been invited in 1788 to produce an oil painting of a Resurrection scene. A better understanding of this original picture can be gathered from this print from an engraving by J Jones in 1796 of the painting, held at Yale Center for British Art, where you can just make out the Calvary crosses on the hill to the left.

A glimpse of the window which was based on this painting can be found in J M W Turner's painting of the East end, with a golden glow from the rising sun behind, shown below; the painting is now in the Salisbury Museum. Other illustrations show this too, including Frederick Nash's 1814 painting of the Lady Chapel (also in the Salisbury Museum), and John Britton illustrated the window in one of the plates in his 1814 'History and Antiquities of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury'. In the Cathedral, the image spans three lancets and the figures shown below the tomb in the engraving don't appear in the window. Incidentally, Reynolds deliberately left the tomb closed to further enhance the miraculous character of the Resurrection.

The window was commissioned by Bishop Barrington when planning the Wyatt 'restoration'; it was painted by Francis Eginton in enamels on grey glass and was installed in 1791. The leading authority Charles Winston, consulted by the Chapter in 1852 on his views for future glass in the Cathedral, was damning in his criticism. Aside from the Lord's immediate presence, 'all around is gloom'; on the glass this is achieved with nearly opaque enamels, leading to a 'flat, heavy appearance, destructive of all impressiveness and widely different from the depth and transparency of the oils in the original picture. The course followed by Eginton was of all others that most calculated to ensure an unsatisfactory result...the red-brown enamel wholly fails of producing that supernatural lurid appearance which seems to have been intended by Sir Joshua Reynolds'. Finding itself unable to live with this ignominy, the window was replaced in 1854 by a series of medallions with scenes from the life of Jesus; this was designed by William Wailes, (who was not the artist recommended by Winston!) but he used pot-metal colours, rather than enamels, to give more vibrancy.



This never proved satisfactory either and when the glass was removed and stored for preservation during WWII, it didn't make it back again. When Christopher Webb reglazed the windows at the East end of the choir aisles (the Herbert and Holgate windows) after the war, the C16/17 glass these aisle windows had contained was used to glaze the East lancets of the Trinity Chapel (seen here), and this was then moved again to the Vestry transept when the Prisoners of Conscience window was commissioned in 1980. The medieval glass from the two outer east window lancets was relocated to the North quire aisle, opposite the Audley Chapel.



Before 1790, the East window contained clear quarries. But back in medieval times it is possible that it would have had historiated (pictorial) glass images, possibly of the Virgin Mary. No records have been found, so this supposition is based on the experience of other cathedrals, like Chartres, whose design was also heavily influenced by the Gothic innovation of Abbot Suger of St Denis. Which brings us back to 1980 and the commissioning of the Prisoners of Conscience window from Gabriel Loire of Chartres. More about that in the next peek!