

A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - NO. 16

MIKE DEEMING WRITES:

Mary Lowndes was one of the most formidable women to emerge from Dorset in the late nineteenth century. Daughter of the Vicar of Sturminster Newton, a canon of Salisbury Cathedral, Mary Lowndes (1857-1929) studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, which was founded in 1871 and from the outset admitted women on equal terms with men. She became a pupil of the artist, Henry Holiday, learning the techniques of stained glass cartooning. At Britton & Gilson, she met and was enormously influenced by Christopher Whall, the pioneer of the Arts & Crafts movement in stained glass. This steered her to take his ideas to their logical conclusion by setting up her own company – Lowndes and Drury – with Alfred Drury (former head glazier at B&G). At her studio-workshop, artists could involve themselves in all stages of the process for designing and making windows, calling on



what support they needed from a few key specialists.



This highly successful venture soon outgrew its premises and in 1906 they moved to a purpose-built facility – the Glass-House – in Lettice Street, Fulham. The building is still there albeit now the home of a yoga studio. In 1922, Lowndes and Drury were invited to re-lead the west window in the Cathedral and to restore the Jesse tree. John Beare's 1819 reglazing at least undid some of the damage of the Wyatt make-over, but the significance of the Jesse window had been lost. In relocating it to the south

nave, Mary Lowndes' team was able to restore its original configuration. Other images were moved there too, notably the 'Bishop and King' (now copied in Chapter House windows) and the two medallions that Roy Spring, the former Clerk of Works, thought may have pre-dated the Cathedral and come from Old Sarum.

So, back to Mary. She was the driving force behind her company which carried out numerous commissions for churches and Cathedrals in the UK, besides nurturing artists of the Arts & Crafts movement at the Glass-House. Two of her own windows can be seen in her father's church, St Mary's, Sturminster Newton. She was also a leading light in the suffrage movement, setting up and chairing the Artists' Suffrage League, the group of women who designed and made posters and banners for the marches, demonstrations and meetings of the



suffrage movement. In her guide to banner-making, she said of the banners: "you do not want to read it, you want to worship it. Choose purple and gold for ambition, red for courage, green for long-cherished hopes ... It is a declaration." She also chaired the executive committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. The statue of the suffragist Millicent Fawcett (one-time Close resident) in Parliament Square features on

its plinth the photographs and names of 55 key women of the movement. Not surprisingly, Mary Lowndes is amongst them.

