

A PEEK THROUGH THE WINDOW - NO. 30

MIKE DEEMING WRITES:

Gabriel Loire considered blue to be the colour of peace. It is certainly the dominant colour in the medieval windows at Chartres and, as the French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc put it – ‘the first condition for an artist in glass is to know how to manage blue’. The medieval glaziers had access to a wide range of blues, but almost no variations of red, yellow and green, so managing the use of blue was crucial to achieving glorious windows. Here Chartres excels, with dark blue dominant and so it requires viewers to take some time for their eyes to adjust to the darkness.



Blue dominates Gabriel Loire's 1980 design for the Prisoners of Conscience window here in Salisbury too; the window is framed by pillars in the early English Gothic style, reminiscent of the Chartres architecture. The Jesse window is also overwhelmingly blue. And blue dominates Gabriel Loire's windows in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in Berlin, built like Coventry Cathedral after being destroyed in WWII, but preserving the old ruins alongside.

A key feature of the Berlin church is the use of *dalle-de-verre* – slab glass that has been broken to create three-dimensional glass pieces -- rather than thin glass sheet. The glass could be 3 – 5 cms thick and the pieces would be bound together in concrete (later epoxy resin) rather than with conventional lead strips (*calmes*). Loire was the major exponent of this material in the post-war period, with the Berlin church being an outstanding example of his work. The angled edges of the *dalle-de-verre* refract and reflect light in different directions creating a far more complex light effect. Another great example of this glass and of his skill is at Grace Cathedral, the Anglican Cathedral in San Francisco. The C19 Gothic



revival cathedral was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and rebuilt mostly after WWII. The rebuild is in concrete, to resist future tremors, but still retains the Gothic style. Here Loire contributed a superb *dalle-de-verre* rose window (predominantly in blue) and 24 lancets in a ‘Human Endeavor’ series. The series features outstanding individuals including John Glenn and Albert Einstein (shown page 1).

Gabriel Loire's work can be found all round the world. But from 1970 onwards he took more of a back seat, concentrating on painting. So although he was responsible for the overall design of the Salisbury window, all the glass cutting, painting and

leading-up was carried out by his son Jacques (pictured here). Indeed over the past 40 years since the PoC window was installed, the Ateliers Loire has gone from strength to strength, being run now by Jacques' two sons, Bruno and Hervé. Their workshop and showroom in Chartres are definitely worth a visit - do go there if you're visiting Chartres Cathedral!

I'm looking forward to writing more about the Prisoners of Conscience window, but I'll probably wait till the scaffolding outside the window is down and there's more light to show off the details of the fascinating design.