

THE STORY OF THE EAST WINDOW OF ST MARY TORY, BRADFORD ON AVON

In February 1999, Canon Bill Mathews, our recently retired vicar, commissioned, on behalf of an anonymous donor, the extraordinarily beautiful three-light stained glass east window to replace an existing plain-glass window in the chapel of St Mary Tory. The anonymous donor, who is in her ninety-fourth year, now feels that the time has come to break the anonymity. She would very much like to know the effect the window has had on those who visit St Mary's and worship there. Her name is Enid German. She writes:

“An inner image prompted me to finance a coloured window to replace the existing plain glass one. After deep concentration in prayer, the design for the central panel came. Those of the two side panels I left to the artist, Mark Angus, then unknown to

me. I passed my ideas to Bill who acted as go-between. I had held Mark Angus in prayer throughout the inner working out *in Spiritu Sancto* — the reason for the marvellous one-ness of inspiration and workmanship”

Its symbolism she sees as universal, beyond the narrowly religious. The simple white *rosa alba* is the soul open to God, depicting our journey to Him

through the sharp thorns of life's pain and grief, but whose deep roots continue to nourish and bring the deepest blessings.

Mark Angus makes clear this absolute fusion of intention and creation in his description of the story of the window. Writing in September 2009, he says:

“Looking at the design today, and having visited the chapel many times since installing the window, it is a pleasure for me to say that I find that I have the opinion that the window is right for its place. And this sense of place is

something which, more than in any other commission before or since, influenced the design. And this is because the chapel itself has such a tremendous spiritual affect on all who enter.

My memory is that I received an invitation from Canon Bill Mathews to make

a design for a stained glass to replace the diamond quarries in the East window. I had visited the small hillside chapel many times and the request gave me great pleasure. I visited again and was again caught by the magic of the place. The chapel is very small, and approached along a beautiful pedestrian way. It has a very special quality of peace and calmness. I considered it right to



*St Mary Tory in the snow, January 2010
photo Bryan Harris*

encourage this mood with a soft, calm window which would pervade the room with light, and create a focus for contemplation, quiet and prayer at the east end. Normally I would proceed to investigate my symbolism, perhaps using books of Christian iconography *etc.*, but in this case I worked completely intuitively. I experimented with various visual effects in water colour until I had a result which pleased me, and one that I knew I would be capable of making in the difficult medium of stained glass. The absence of concrete Christian symbolism in favour of a more directly spiritual approach felt right to me, although I was on tenterhooks to hear the reaction of Canon Mathews. It was with great pleasure then to receive an enthusiastic reaction from the Canon, presumably also representing the views of the donor.

The three lights merge to give one overall impression although each lancet is very different in character. This overall impression is very important, and the mood I wanted to create was one of active quietness. The use of opal white, and pale blues with smaller amounts of soft primary colours would do this for me.

The left-hand lancet has the feeling of two walls through which a way can be found. There is a suggestion of a ladder motif also, but the feeling is for something solid that is dissolving

perhaps. The right-hand lancet also has an overarching motif. But this time the motif is descending rather than ascending as I experience it in the left hand lancet. The drawing on the right suggests tears

or rain drops, and the whole effect is of descending, is very soft and fluid. The central lancet is the most important of course, and here we can see most clearly a rose, a mystical rose, which is both contained and is free. A wandering line of colour runs the height of the lancet giving the rose a spiritual trajectory.

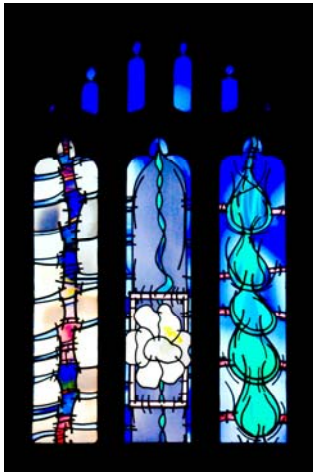
So now we have the whole image. Of a garden, of nature, of light, of the mystic, of refreshing tears and of

raindrops, of sky, of Heaven. It is an escape from the hard realities of life, a retreat and a resting place.

The window is not, however, secular in its intention or effect. The window carries a fundamental Christian message. Yet it does so without stepping over a border towards traditional signs and imagery. As such it has touched the hearts of many who enter this wonderful chapel seeking rest and spiritual renewal.”

Mrs German would love to hear any stories you may have in connection with the East window. She now lives at Claremont, The Linleys, Gastard Road, Corsham SN13 9PD.

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*Mark Angus's East window
photo Bryan Harris*