



The stained glass in St Mary's

William Wailes of Newcastle, the maker of the Wreay windows, was a grocer in Mosley Street but, from 1832, he experimented with stained glass. Augustus Pugin chose to use Wailes from around 1840 because he produced better quality windows at the lowest price.

In the 18th century windows were painted with enamel colours which, when fired, bonded with the surface of the plain glass. The Gothic revivalists rejected this method for the true principles joining small pieces of glass together with H-shaped lead strips, mosaic fashion. Enamel was only used for detailed drawing.

At St Mary's the density of the leading emphasises each aperture, as much a decoration of the exterior as a conduit of light for the interior. The windows were conceived to make the exterior link to the interior and that the church was carefully conceived as a whole. The coloured lamps in the apse that stand in front of small circular gaps when lit, can be seen from the outside. The stained glass windows were an integral part of the original plan.

The larger windows that occupy the body of the nave were assembled in Wailes's workshop and transported across by rail to be installed by a local tradesman, George Rowell of Gray Goat Lane, off English Street in Carlisle.

Miss Losh and Wailes both had knowledge of medieval Continental and British windows and they chose a thirteenth century grisaille design. This was less costly than figures and Miss Losh paid only £42.16s. 8d for the entire glazing. Grisaille windows consisted of geometric patterns of leaded glass straps, usually in grey-white with a minimal amount of colour, often red and blue, and were originally found in situations where light was required. The white glass was enlivened with lines of curving botanical motifs painted in brown enamel. In the side windows Wailes adopted a format of outer areas with a re-cycled selection of fragments on the outer areas. The quatrefoils and circles give a super-structure to the otherwise haphazard windows and introduce an accurate historical element.

The three windows at the west are densely filled with recycled shards without the transparent centre found in the side windows. Some traditional Christian emblems occur as focal points - crosses and decorative Ms - symbols of the Virgin Mary.

The pieces of glass that are recycled give an insight into the history of stained glass prior to the church. Wailes, having been involved in restoration work, had built up a store of pieces of redundant glass. The patchwork, besides having Wailes's own glass, and incorporating Septimus Losh's supposed medieval French glass, also contains pieces from the eighteenth century. This Georgian glass is thin, extensively painted with a limited range of colour, favourites being orange and purple: examples can be seen throughout the windows.

Little figure-work occurs in the windows. There are portions and details on shards taken from figurative windows in addition to fragments from grisaille. One can detect pieces of a crowned Christ, flowers, a lion's head, parts of inscriptions beside the usual motifs of acanthus and oak leaves and acorns. Also there are examples of acid etching in which a blue layer of glass is selectively dissolved away to reveal a white layer beneath.

In the three windows in the west wall one can make out fragments of eighteenth century painting, and Wailes's own glass pieces of tracery, medieval lettering (the whole of the word St John), and, in the centre light, Wailes's own monogram appears twice.

In common with the rest of the building, the use of stained glass is unconventional and makes reference to many traditions. The glazing scheme was unlike any other of its date and the iconography expresses nature and cosmic time rather than the normal channels through which Christians worshipped. The hagiography of saints and prophets are deliberately shunned in favour of a generalised reference to medievalism or the eternal truths of the natural world and in this Sarah Losh was a woman of her time.

Bill Waters