

Village Echoes

Following the damage caused to St Mary's Church by the blast from parachute mines in November 1940 (November's Village Echoes), windows were temporarily boarded up until such time as circumstances were favourable for their proper restoration. In 1944 the window layout was circulated to various church members in order to garner opinion on which windows should be re-glazed in clear glass and which repaired, and in January 1945 the Church Windows Committee commissioned a report from Martin Travers, a well-regarded British stained glass artist, in order to understand how much work would be involved in the restoration. His comments on the condition of the windows, and his recommendations as to the work needed, were received favourably.

Some effort was made to contact family members of those commemorated in the hope that they could be persuaded to contribute to the costs of repair. Of the two replies which have survived, both correspondents expressed surprise on learning that their ancestors had a commemorative window in the church. One declined on the grounds that money was short, and Lord Cranbrook replied that, based on other windows installed elsewhere by his Victorian ancestors, the aesthetic merits of the Ridgway windows were unlikely to warrant saving. Despite this, the committee voted to repair the Ridgway windows which were so badly damaged that they had to be sent to London for repair.

A decision which had been taken in January 1945 to re-glaze only four of the windows with plain glass was later overturned, and Bowman glassworks were commissioned to re-glaze 14 windows in all. This elicited a strongly worded letter of complaint from an (unknown) member of the committee suggesting that the wishes of both the committee members and the parishioners they had consulted had been ignored.

A window commemorating Edith Gunning, designed by Paul Woodroffe and installed in 1907, had been only slightly damaged. However, Travers felt that it was "sickly in colouring", and he wanted to remove some of the coloured glass (especially the purple grapes) to make the whole thing more in keeping with the historic nature of the church. In the end, neither Travers nor one of the committee who disliked the window so much that he wanted it removed altogether, got their way: the window was repaired, albeit without the original commemorative inscription to Edith and her parents, Thomas and Frances Reeves, who had commissioned it. Travers eventually withdrew his services.

In December 1945 James Hogan, another eminent stained glass designer who worked for James Powell & Son at their Whitefriars glassworks off Fleet Street, was approached for help with the destroyed east window. After some delay and with a few minor amendments, his design for the Te Deum window was accepted in November 1946, and the finished window was unveiled by the Venerable Julian Bickersteth, Archdeacon of Maidstone, on 18th July 1948.

Pieces of broken glass from the windows damaged in 1940 were later collected and sorted, the Victorian pieces were discarded, and the ancient glass was made into a panel which is now in the Bedgebury Chapel.

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