

New Abbey Church East Window



Our stained glass window was installed in 1914 as a memorial to Dr James Stewart Wilson and his wife. Dr Wilson was minister from 1863 until his death in 1910, and the window was a gift from his family. Originally the East window must have been an exact copy of the West window. The new window was made to replace the plain glass within the space and stonework of the old one.

Our window was designed and made by the William Morris Company, which functioned for over eighty years in London and in Surrey during the reigns of Victoria, Edward, and George V and VI.

William Morris was a bit of a rebel. He disliked intensely the heavy, ornate furnishings of the Victorian age which he described as vulgar and ostentatious, and bemoaned the lack of opportunity for true craftsmanship in the factory-based mass production of textiles, wallpapers and furnishings.

In 1861, with his artist friend, Edward Burne-Jones, he set up his own firm to design and manufacture textiles, wallpapers and furniture based on the natural forms of flowers, leaves and birds. In addition Morris & Co. had a stained glass window department to supply the growing and fashionable demand for stained glass memorial windows in churches, public buildings and even in the homes of the well-to-do. Burne-Jones became the Chief Designer and produced hundreds of drawings in the classical style, being quite untouched by the Impressionist art of some of his contemporaries. Morris, who drew the leaves and flowers, also had a flair for selecting the right colours and shapes of glass before they were joined together by lead in the workshop.

William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones died in the last years of the 19th Century but Morris & Co. continued to use their designs until, without new design input, the firm gradually went into artistic decline and closed down in 1948.

By the time our window was made in 1914 there was a large catalogue of designs (St. Luke, St. Matthew and St. John in the catalogue were numbers 17, 18 and 19 by B.-J.) so that customers were able to mix and match to suit their purpose. For example, if your Church was named St. Andrew's and you had only one window to fill with stained glass, then you

could have ordered Andrew, the disciple, and a picture of the Feeding of the 5000, since Andrew was the one who found the boy with the five loaves and two fishes.

Whoever decided on the designs for our window chose the four evangelists. The main figures, the angels and the panels below were all original Burne-Jones designs, but six other artists and many craftsmen were involved in making the window, using the methods which had proved so successful over the previous fifty years.

This window was made to measure for our church and is most probably unique. We reap the benefit of William Morris' vision and Burne-Jones' artistry to provide an example of many hands working together to make a thing of great beauty. It's worth noting, however, that you have to be INSIDE the church to see the window to its best advantage.

Edith A B McDonald
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