

The Stained Glass Windows in Rosslyn Chapel

Much of the information in this paper is taken from an article written by Mark Bambrough of Scottish Glass Studios, Glasgow, who carried out the conservation of Rosslyn Chapel's windows between 2009 and 2014, and is reproduced with the author's permission.



Rosslyn Chapel following conservation of the stained glass windows, stonework and roof.

Stained Glass Windows

While the art form of stained glass has ancient origins, it reached its height of popularity during the medieval period, used in churches as a means of illustrating Biblical stories for illiterate congregations. Often referred to as the 'Poor Man's Bible' for their ability to tell stories without using words, stained glass windows were used for both decorative and practical reasons within medieval churches.

Sadly, virtually no medieval stained glass remains in Scotland due to the effects of the Reformation. While Rosslyn Chapel is a medieval church, the beautiful stained glass windows you see here today are not a product of the original build.

15th Century

It has always been thought that Rosslyn Chapel would originally have had such windows. However, during our 15 year conservation programme, we have discovered that the window frames in Rosslyn Chapel were originally designed to take glazing, but we have found no evidence that windows were ever installed.

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Mark Bambrough, in his article *Rosslyn Chapel: A Glazing History* (Journal of Stained Glass vol XXX, 2006) considers what glazing might have been in place when the Chapel was built:



An early image of Rosslyn Chapel from 1693 by John Slezer, *Theatrum Scotiae*.

'In his account of the Chapel's construction, "Genealogy of the Sainteclaires of Rosslyn" (1700), Father Augustine Hay makes no mention at all of glaziers being used. All the other trades you would expect to be there are quite clearly detailed. If glaziers were used, Hay would certainly have mentioned them, especially given that glass within a building at this time would have been considered a very high status inclusion, and certainly would have been chronicled as such.' (Bambrough p18)

One reason why there may never have been any windows in the Chapel is because once William St Clair died, the Chapel was not completed as he had envisioned it. His son Oliver took over construction, and he did not complete his father's vision. It is possible that the windows had not been installed at the time of William's death, and that Oliver did not bother to do so. Perhaps the glass was too expensive. Perhaps it was felt that stained glass windows were unnecessary in such an intricately carved building.

'From this only two conclusions can be drawn, either stained glass was considered superfluous in that the richly carved interior adequately expressed the liturgy, or stained glass became prohibitively expensive. Either way, the surviving architectural evidence appears to be clear the building was intended to take glass.' (Bambrough p19)

Bambrough speculates that there could well have been an alternative material used to fill the window spaces, such as paper or linen cloth, as there is contemporary evidence of such material being used.

In the years following the completion of the Chapel, grilles and shutters were installed on the outside of the windows. These shutters would have acted as the only protection against the elements. The iron hinge pins that held these shutters are still visible today. But they are roughly hewn, and appear like an afterthought.

'Rosslyn does not have any masonry rebate detail to suggest that the building was initially intended to have shutters.' (Bambrough p21)

The Reformation

It is well recorded that the Chapel suffered from the effects of the Reformation. The altars were ordered to be destroyed in 1592. The Presbytery records of the time do not make any mention of stained glass or of an order to remove windows.

'The destruction and removal of sainted imagery was part of the religious Reformation throughout England and Scotland at that time . . . If stained glass had been present in Rosslyn at the time, it would surely have been mentioned in the same presbytery records that required the Laird to remove the altars.' (Bambrough p22)



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18th Century

During the 17th century and into the 18th century, the Chapel lay abandoned. In 1736, General James St Clair commissioned repairs to the Chapel. The shutters were removed from the outside of the Chapel, and the windows were glazed with common glass in timber casements. General James St Clair began work on the Chapel for the first time since it was abandoned over 150 years before.

19th Century



This photograph dates from 1860-62 and depicts sculptor, Laurence Baxter, who was responsible for stone restoration works in the Chapel. The leaded glass window behind is clearly visible.

The restoration that had begun in the 1730s continued into the 19th century. Stained glass experienced a huge revival during the Victorian period, led in Scotland by the Episcopal Church, and it is during this revival that the windows you see today were installed in the Chapel.

A new period of restoration in the Chapel occurred between 1837 and the 1840s by the 3rd Earl of Rosslyn before it was rededicated as a place of worship for the Scottish Episcopal Church in 1862. In order for Rosslyn to become a place of Episcopalian worship, the Earl of Rosslyn would have needed to adapt the interior of the Chapel to meet the Church's standards. At the time of the Chapel's rededication, the Episcopal Church in Scotland saw stained glass as '*essential to the manifestation of the spiritual.*' (Bambrough p14). In order to meet the Church's expectation of stained glass windows, Lord Rosslyn was in contact with the well-known window makers, Clayton & Bell of London, in December of 1862. These renowned craftsmen designed the windows for the newly rededicated Chapel, the installation beginning at the Lady Chapel in 1867 and culminating with the large east window in 1869.

Clayton & Bell were highly regarded English stained glass designers and producers. Characteristically of the Gothic revival, they were inspired by early 12th and 13th century stained glass. The popularity of Clayton & Bell increased the demand for their windows, and by 1862 the quality of their work began to decline. Steps were taken to avoid expensive design work, using a simpler format. The cost-saving devices employed by Clayton & Bell are evident in the Chapel. We are aware that the Earl had to be very cost conscious, so this could well have been at his instruction.

The windows installed during this time are not specific to the history of the St Clair family. These windows depict stories of the Old and New Testaments, Biblical heroes, and angels and appear to follow a fairly typical High Church pattern of the time. The windows in the clerestory however, are more specific to the time period in which they were built. These four stained glass windows are said to be a '*testament to the Gothic and Templar revival of the period*' (Bambrough p16). The warrior saints and angels depicted in these windows are related to popular legends and political events of the day. Four windows in the clerestory are filled with stained glass, while the others are filled with clear glass.

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Description of the Windows

The Lady Chapel

There are six windows in the Lady Chapel (4-9), one on each end and one over each altar depicting the 12 apostles. From left to right when looking at the Lady Chapel the windows are as follows:



4 St Peter

St James the Greater



5 St John

St Andrew

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6 St Phillip

St Bartholomew



7 St Matthew

St Thomas

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8 St James the Less

St Thaddeus



9 St Simon

St Matthias

Underneath these windows there is an inscription on a brass plaque that reads:

'In memory of dear parents by whom this chapel was restored to the service of God AD 1862, Ac mejorem dei gloriam [to the greater glory of God] the stained glass windows in the Ladye Chapel were placed by Francis Robert, Fourth Earl of Rosslyn, AD 1867.'

These are the oldest stained glass windows in the Chapel.

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East Aisle

In the east aisle, the north windows (10 & 11) depict:



10 St John the Baptist
with a lamb

St Paul with a sword



11 St Luke

St Mark

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South Aisle

In the south aisle, beginning at the west end, the windows (15-17) depict:



14 Sermon on the Mount

The Miracle of the netting of fishes



15 Raising of Jairus's daughter

Miracle at the marriage feast of Cana

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16 Christ blessing little children

The Last Supper



17 The Resurrection

The Crucifixion

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Main Altar

The stained glass window above the main altar in the choir (18), the east window, depicts the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The window on the left shows three women arriving at the tomb of Jesus, and the window on the right shows two angels, one of whom is holding a scroll that reads, *'He is not here but is risen.'* It dates to 1869.



18 The Resurrection of Jesus Christ

West End



19 Jesus Christ in Glory

On the west end of the Chapel above the organ gallery is the west window (19). This represents Jesus Christ in glory. His right hand is raised in blessing, and his left is holding a sceptre. He is supported on the left by an angel holding a book meant to represent the Law, and on the right by an angel holding a cup, thought to represent the Sacrament or Gospel.

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Clerestory

The original intention was for all windows in the clerestory to be filled with warriors from the Old Testament, but only four are filled with stained glass (20-23). These were completed around 1887.

On the north side of the clerestory from left to right are:



20 St Longinus



21 St George

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On the south aisle is:



22 St Maurice



23 St Michael

Further Reading

Mark Bambrough, *Rosslyn Chapel: A Glazing History*, 2006, Article in the *Journal of Stained Glass* volume XXX

Will Grant, *Rosslyn: Its Castle, Chapel and Scenic Lore*, 1947, Dysart and Rosslyn Estates

Rosslyn Chapel Guide Book: The Earl of Rosslyn, Rosslyn Chapel Trust 1997

Richard Augustine Hay, 1835, *Genealogy of the Sainteclaires of Rosslyn*, TG Stevenson, Edinburgh

www.rosslynchapel.com