

HEAVEN IN PURGATORY

The HARRY CLARKE windows in Lough Derg

Photographs by Brian Lynch



St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg, Co. Donegal, has the largest collection of windows by Harry Clarke, Ireland's most talented stained glass artist of our century.

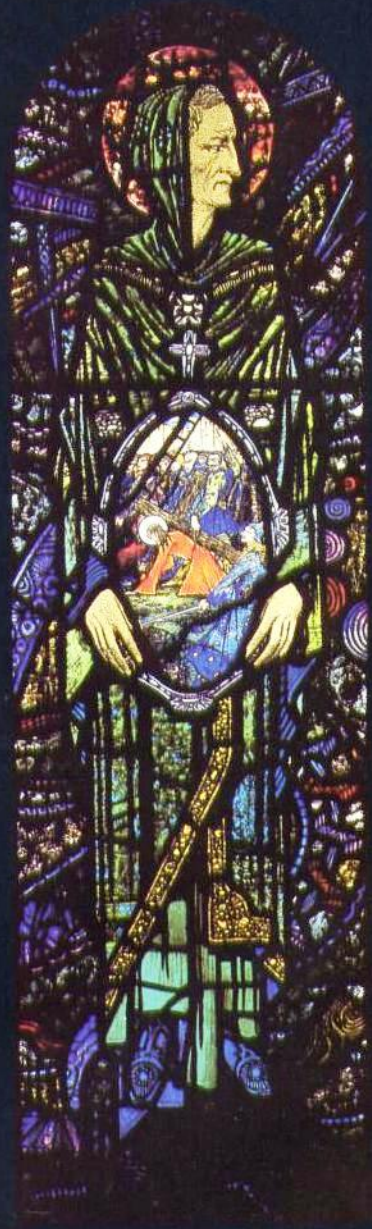
To see the windows, you normally have to go on a three-day pilgrimage, walking around barefoot, having a sleepless night and being fed on bread and water, which makes it feel more like hell than purgatory.



1 The Apostle Peter and Jesus is condemned to death



2 St. Paul with Jesus takes up his cross



3 Andrew, the Apostle and Jesus falls the first time

In 1989, however, the parish priest, Monsignor MacSorley, sent these precious Harry Clarke windows to be restored by the Abbey Stained Glass Studios in Dublin, who are acknowledged experts in this field.

Subsequently, the Abbey Studios exhibited the windows at the Royal Hospital, close to their studios at Kilmainham, and gave us the unique opportunity of looking at Clarke's magical colours and compositions at close quarters — an experience which we would like you to share with us.

Dr. Nicola Gordon Bowe explains the background:

In February 1927, Harry Clarke was inundated with work — a set of decorative windows for Bewley's Café, a window commissioned as Ireland's official gift to the League of Nations in Geneva, and others in Scotland and England. He also had schemes of interior decoration and graphic design and book illustrations to complete, exhibition deadlines to meet. All this on top of running the large and thriving Studios he had built up at numbers 6 and 7 North Frederick Street in Dublin since his father's death six years earlier. Furthermore, his own health was deteriorating; in four years he would be dead.

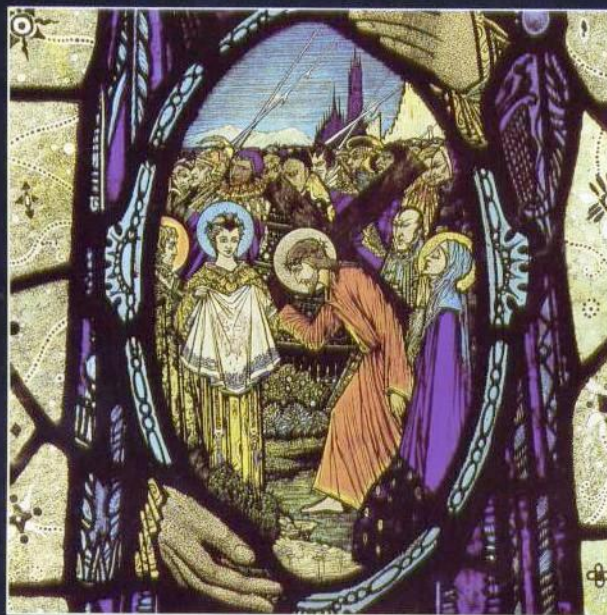
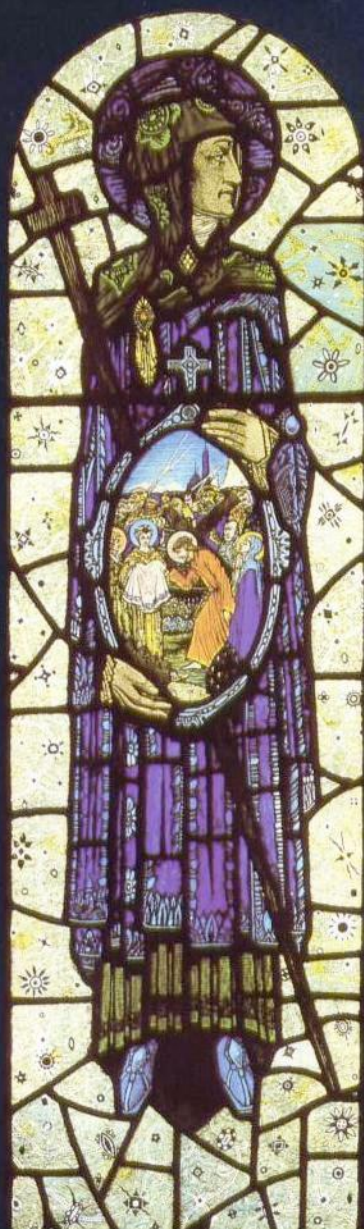
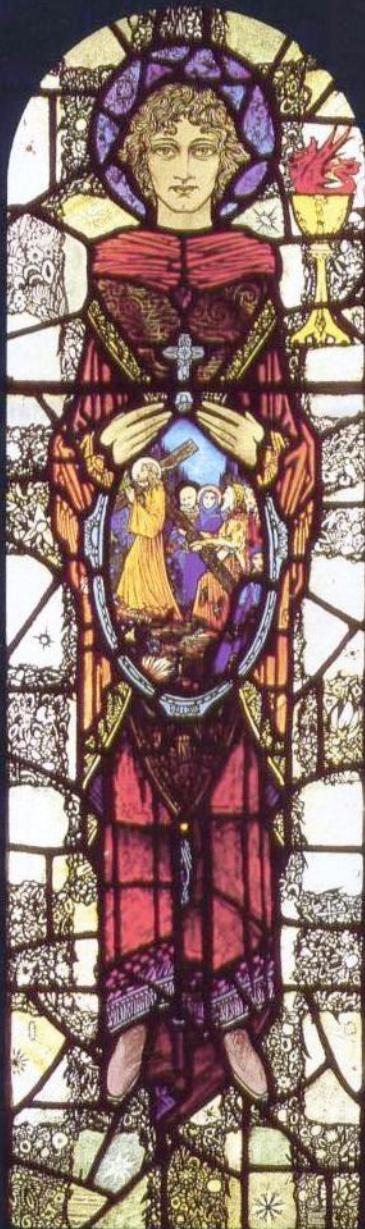
Canon Keown had worked with Clarke since 1925, on the extensive series of windows for St. Joseph's, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, where he had been Dean. So when Professor William Scott's new basilica was completed on the penitential island of St. Patrick's Purgatory in Lough Derg, he commissioned Clarke to design stained glass for the fourteen windows which would denote the Stations of the Cross. It was decided that each should portray one of the Apostles, St. Paul and Our Lady, who would hold small oval mandorla panels depicting each Station. Clarke's small-scale, exquisitely detailed and annotated pencil drawings and splodgy colour notations were accompanied by full-scale coloured designs of these inset panels. The Studios would copy them directly on to glass, while the small preparatory studies would be photographically enlarged to serve as cartoons and guides for selecting and cutting the glass.

The Clarke Studio artists began the windows in Harry Clarke's absence, although following his careful instructions. The Dublin architect, Mr. Cullen, had taken over as architect of the church on Professor Scott's death. Clarke had escaped to a studio in London to try and work in peace on the Geneva window and his illustrations to a selection of Swinburne's poetry. On 7th January, 1928, the *Irish Times* published a profile on him, reporting on the progress of the Lough Derg windows, among others. His choice of glass, detail, colour, design and leading are all fully evident in the dramatically effective concept of these windows, even though any study of the original designs for the inset panels and their realization in glass will reveal his absence. The windows were completed under extraordinary pressure of work and after his enforced departure for a sanatorium in Switzerland. The Studios did all the glazing for the huge reinforced concrete basilica. The windows were consecrated in June 1929 to great acclaim.

The windows are smaller than one would expect from their design and the presence of the figures portrayed. Their saintly images are presented theatrically hovering in spiritual ecstasy, dressed in heavenly raiment of symbolic colours, against a fulminating backdrop of richly whirling decorative patterns and colours. For Peter, bearing his golden keys, red denotes joy, charity and martyrdom; for Paul, with his sword, Andrew with his wheel and transverse cross and James Major with his pilgrim's staff and ball and chain, green is for hope and promise. For John the Evangelist with his Chalice and winged serpent, wine red is for love, while Philip the Wayfarer wears green and blue for purity. Bartholomew is dressed as an Orthodox bishop, holding his martyr's flaying knife, Thomas as a hieratic builder, Matthew, with his purse, in deep violet for penance, James with a Fuller's pole, as a bishop ornate with gold for innocence and Thaddeus with halberd, in purple for penance and crimson for charity. Simon, with his saw, also wears crimson beside Matthias with his battle axe, in gold, red and blue. The Virgin is clad in symbolic blues, gold, purple and green.

On Clarke's last visit home to Dublin, he was delighted by Beatrice Toal Coogan's rhapsody in the *Irish Independent* (26th May, 1930) on the windows, written after a sunset when:

'the Western glow suffuses the white marble with prismatic tints and the whole church is filled with coloured rays streaming from off the sun like seraph's wings'.



4 The Apostle James with Jesus meets his mother

5 John the Evangelist and Simon helping Jesus to carry his cross, and

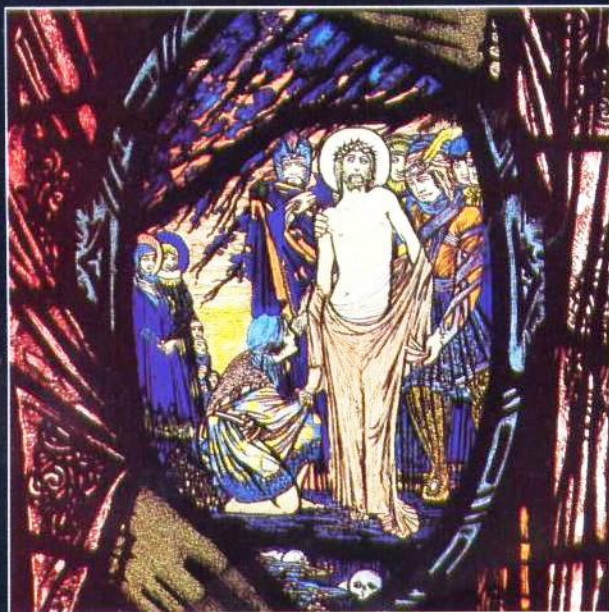
6 Philip, the Apostle, with Veronica wiping the face of Jesus with the cloth, a detail enlarged at left.



7 St. Bartholomew holds Jesus falling the second time;

8 Thomas bears The women of Jerusalem weeping for Jesus detail (left)

9 St. Matthew with Jesus falls the third time,



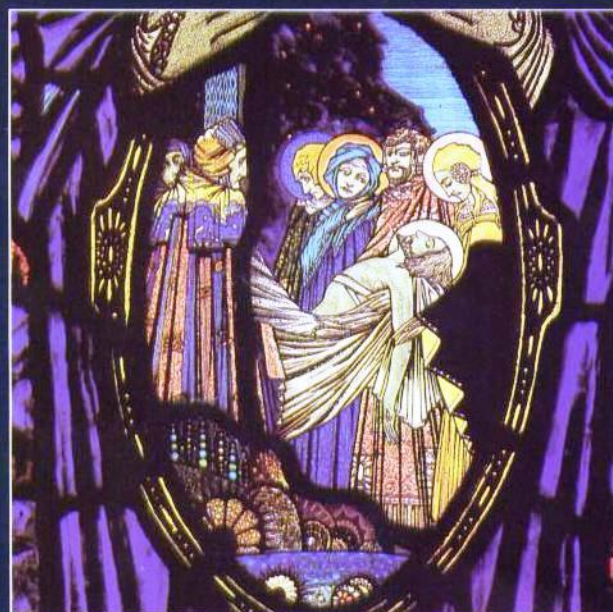
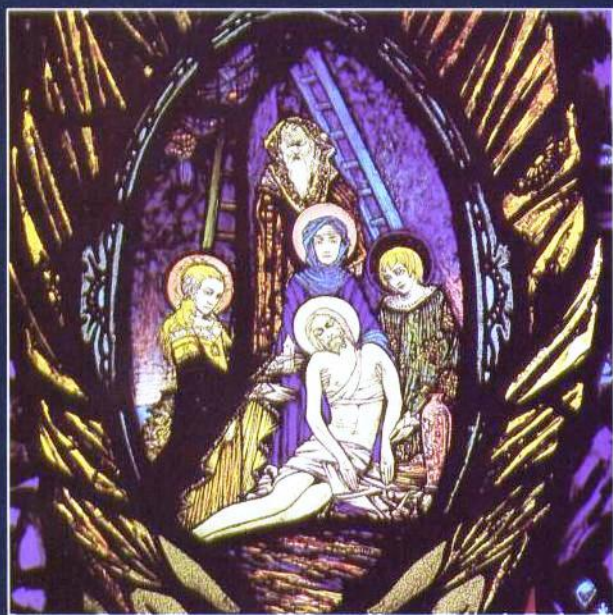
10 St. James the less and Jesus is stripped of his clothes, with detail shown

11 Thaddeus and Jesus is nailed to the cross and

12 The Apostle Simon

Dr. Nicola Gordon Bowe is a lecturer at the National College of Art and author of 'The Life and works of Harry Clarke (Irish Academic Press).

(Right) the final stations: 13, **St. Matthias** and 14, **Our Blessed Lady**.
(Below) **Jesus taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb.**





One of Clarke's early masterpieces, **The Unhappy Judas**, of 1913, was inspired by Chartres cathedral. Although not a part of the Lough Derg set of windows, it was exhibited along with them in Dublin by the Abbey Stained Glass Studios.



Stations of the Cross

St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg

1	Apostle Peter	Jesus is condemned to death
2	St. Paul	Jesus takes up his Cross
3	Apostle Andrew	Jesus falls the first time
4	Apostle James	Jesus meets his mother
5	Apostle John The Evangelist	Simon helps Jesus to carry his Cross
6	Apostle Philip	Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
7	Apostle Bartholomew	Jesus falls the second time
8	Apostle Thomas	The women of Jerusalem weep for Jesus
9	Apostle Matthew	Jesus falls the third time
10	Apostle James the Less	Jesus is stripped of his clothes
11	Apostle Thaddeus	Jesus is nailed to the Cross
12	Apostle Simon	Jesus dies on the Cross
13	St. Matthias	The body of Jesus is taken down from the Cross
14	Our Blessed Lady	The body of Jesus is laid in the tomb