

Winter 1996

STAINED GLASS



QUARTERLY OF THE STAINED GLASS ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

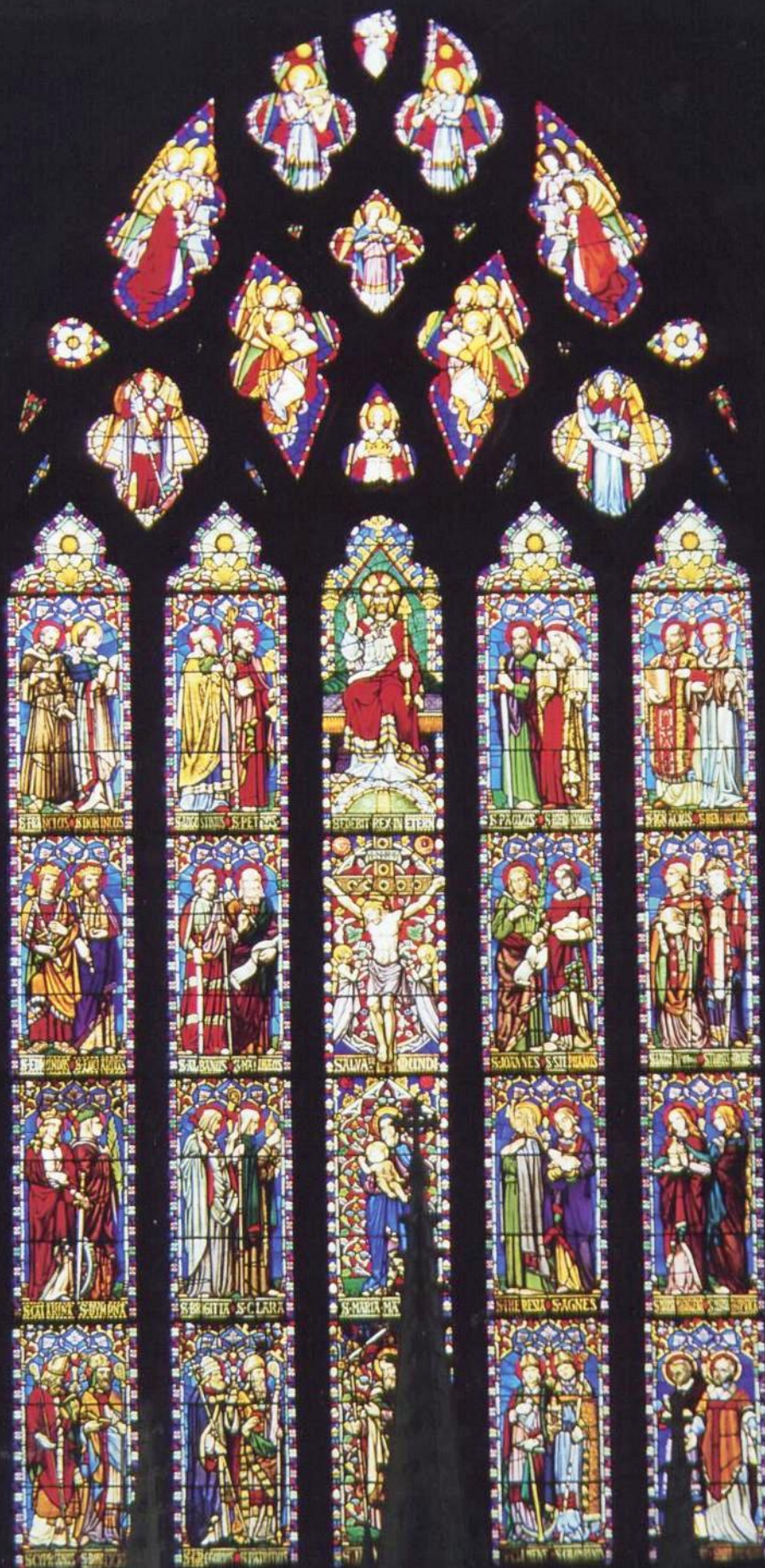
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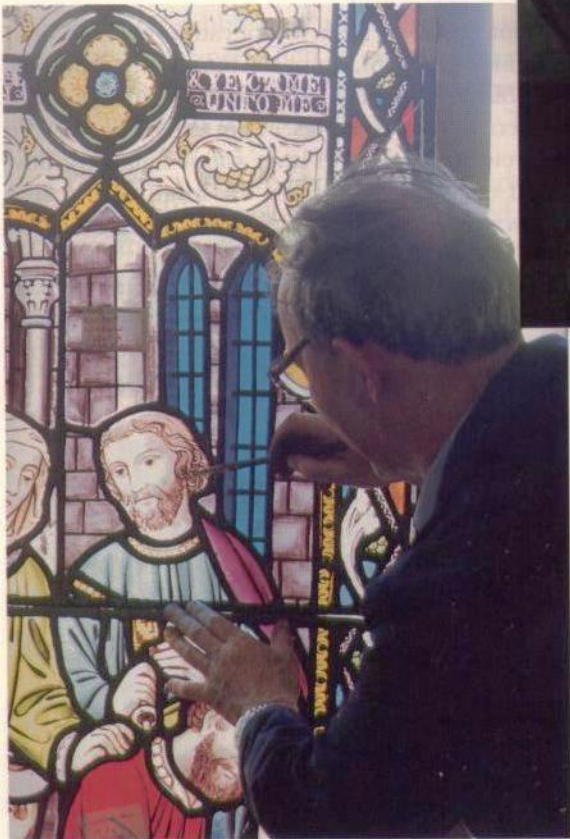
90TH ANNIVERSARY!

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Restoring an Irish Masterpiece



Opposite Page: *East Window*, St. James Church, Dublin, Ireland. This window was restored by Abbey Stained Glass Studios after it was destroyed in an accidental explosion in Dublin. This window is an example of the mid-Victorian revival of stained glass.

Above: The painted glass is fired on a Plaster of Paris tray.

Left: A craftsman inspects the restored artwork.

Article by Ken Ryan, Managing Director of Abbey Stained Glass Studios, Dublin

Up to the early 1900s most of the stained glass windows in Ireland were imported from Germany and France. These were very pleasing works in light pastel shades with large pieces of painted glass and a minimal amount of lead. However, there is a sameness about these works as one travels through the country and visits different churches.

After the turn of the century there was an explosion of talent in Ireland in the design and manufacture of stained glass windows. An Túr Gloine (The Tower of Glass) was established by a group of artists such as A.E. Child, Sarah Purser, Michael Healy, Evie Hone, Wilhelmina Geddes, Beatrice Elvery, Ethel Rhind and Catherine O'Brien in 1903; they produced fine works for almost 50 years. However, the most outstanding artist Ireland has produced was Harry Clarke (1890-1931). In his short lifetime he worked at a frenzied pace and gathered around him a group of highly qualified artists who could follow his unusual techniques.



The perished lead was stripped away and each piece of glass cleaned.

New styles of stained glass called for very dark colors: purples, blues, greens and rubies. They also contained a large number of leads throughout as a part of the artwork. Great emphasis was placed on aciding and plating glass, and two or three layers of glass were quite common.

One of the most impressive examples of Irish stained glass can be found at St. Brendan's Cathedral in Loughrea, County Galway. This Cathedral is home to the greatest cross section of stained glass in Ireland. Among the artists whose work can be seen at St. Brendan's is Michael Healy, who began his stained glass work in 1904 and completed his final commission in 1937. His West Transept windows depicting *The Ascension* and *The Last Judgement* are a joy to behold when the afternoon sun shines through the colored jewels in the windows.

Among Harry Clarke's technical and artistic masterpieces, one of his finest is the *Geneva Window*, which was commissioned by the Irish Government for presentation to the International Labor Organization in Geneva. This window depicts scenes from plays by a number of Irish writers. One of the plays by Liam O'Flaherty showed an obese Mr. Gilhooley drooling as he watched a beautiful girl dancing in the scantiest clothing. The Irish Government, having commissioned the work, paid for it but were unhappy with it and did not feel that it was suitable to represent Ireland.

After Harry Clarke's death in 1931 and much correspondence with the Irish Government, the window was returned to the Clarke Studios, who refunded the commission fee of £450. This stained glass treasure was on exhibition for a number of years and was recently sold to the Wolfsonian

Institute in Florida. This is a most unfortunate loss to Ireland but of course a great gain for the United States of America.

Currently in Ireland there is a re-awakening of interest in the beautiful stained glass which surrounds us. Most of it is part of either Catholic or Church of Ireland churches. These works of art are being cataloged, and their condition is now being monitored.

Recently, one of the large brewing vats in Guinness Brewery exploded accidentally in the early hours of the morning. Thankfully, no one was injured in the blast. However, the brewery is in a high-density section of Dublin close to the city center; the complex covers a large part of old Dublin and is next to St. James Church, which was home to a magnificent stained glass window by one of Ireland's first stained glass artists, Michael O'Connor.

O'Connor's Studios were in operation from 1830 to 1880; the window for St. James Church was commissioned in 1859. It is an extremely complex five-light window with ten major traceries. The explosion in the Guinness Brewery caused this huge stained glass window to be sucked outward, away from the building. It came crashing down and was smashed beyond recognition.

The first step was to try to recover all of the broken glass. The craftsmen of the Abbey Stained Glass Studios were dispatched to the church grounds, where they collected literally bucketsful of tangled stained glass. The



Lead joints are soldered.

remainder of the 50-foot-high stained glass window, still hanging precariously *in situ*, was numbered, and these bits and pieces of panels were removed to be taken to the Studios.

As the window consisted of panels representing 20 different subjects, no one was exactly sure which panel went where. Luckily, the National Gallery of Ireland had cataloged this window. One of their slides was used to create a three-foot-tall print showing the original window. This gave us the information we needed for the next harrowing stage.

All the many fragments of broken glass had to be laid out and matched with the remnants of the removed panels. Several months of painstaking jigsaw work let us place all of the fragments in our possession. However, there were still missing pieces, and, even of those we had, some were damaged beyond recognition.

We took rubbings of the stained glass to give us a plan for each panel. Then we started to remove the 150-year-old lead. The perished lead, no stronger than paper, easily came away from the glass.

Each piece of glass had to be cleaned dry by rubbing them with wire wool; the old, hardened putty at the edges of the glasses was gently chipped away. Some of the glass had such a thick layer of grime and pollution that they were cleaned with an acid solution.

Once the pieces were cleaned and arranged, we had to fill in the gaps. Advice on the depths of color of various pieces and aid in completing some of the destroyed Latin inscriptions came from Dr. Michael Wynne, Keeper of the National Gallery of Ireland.

Artist Kevin Kelly began painting glass to match artwork which the great Michael O'Connor had painted 150 years earlier. One of the problems we encountered was that the stained glass had aged. Over the years, some of the painted work had faded. We therefore had to reproduce this aging by gently rubbing the painted work with an artist's brush before kiln-firing the glass. These newly-painted pieces match closely the older, aged elements of the panels. Approximately 20 percent of the original glass had to be replaced.

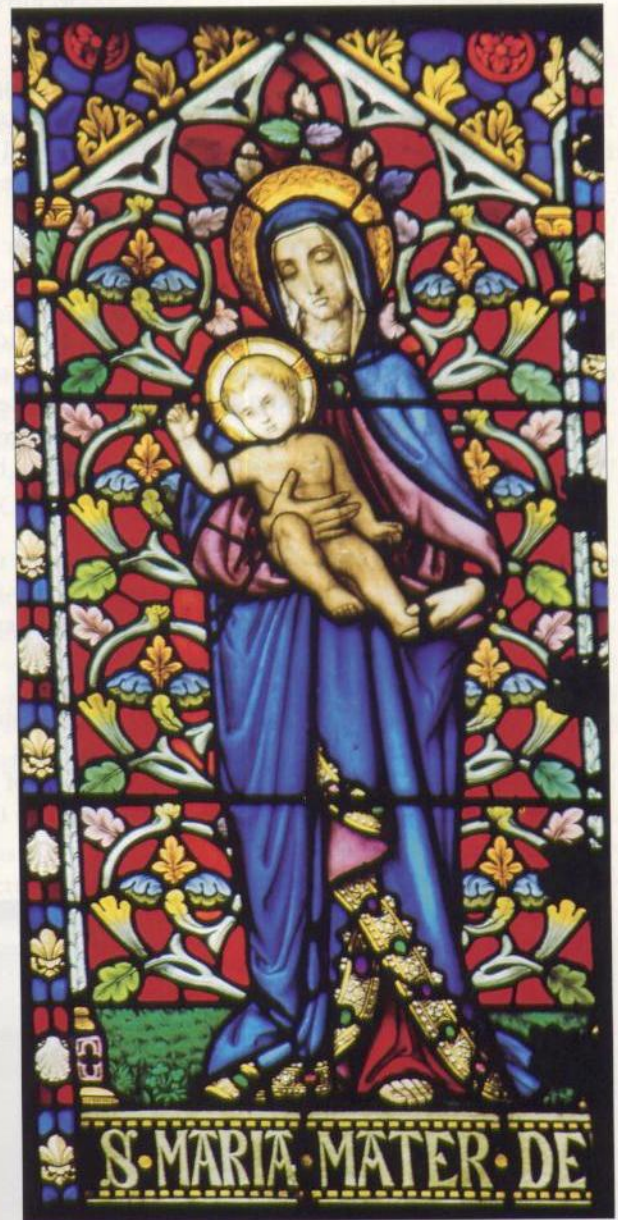
With the glass pieces replicated, the leading-up started in earnest, and all hands in our studio were involved. New leads were cut and fitted around the irregularly shaped glasses and soldered at the joints. The panels were then cemented, making the lead comes more rigid and, of course, waterproof. The final in-studio portion of this job was to solder on copper tie wires to hold the windows securely to the new tie bars on site.

One year after the explosion in the Guinness Brewery, the craftsmen of the Abbey Stained Glass Studios returned the window to St. James Church. It took three weeks to carry out the reinstallation and refit-



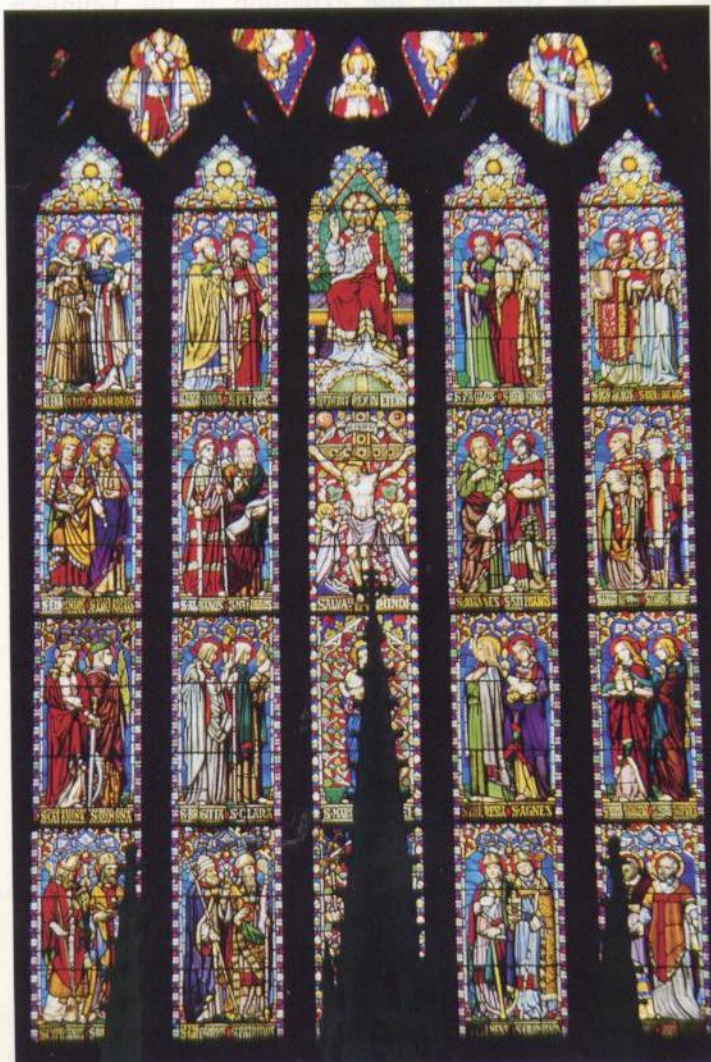
Cement putty is forced into the lead.

ting of the many panels of this window. When the protective screen and scaffolding were removed, one could almost hear the gasps of amazement from those in attendance, who anxiously waited to see the restored stained glass window. It was impossible to distinguish the new glass from the old. Because all of the glass was cleaned, it looked and sparkled like it must have when it was originally installed, almost a century and a half ago.



Right: *Our Lady Mother of God*. Detail from the *East Window* of St. James Church, Dublin.

Below: Detail of *East Window*.



The Abbey Stained Glass Studios were founded by my late father in 1944. We are proud of our record of restoration of stained glass in Ireland. Some of our recent projects include Lough Derg Basilica, Cavan Cathedral, Enniscorthy Cathedral, Kildare Cathedral, Limerick Cathedral, St. Patrick's Cathedral Dublin, Killarney Cathedral, pro Cathedral Dublin, Loughrea Cathedral, Tuam Cathedral, Ballina Cathedral and many other projects.

The Abbey Stained Glass Studios, 18 Old Kilmainham, Dublin 8, Ireland. The Abbey Stained Glass Studios can be reached by telephone at: 011-353-1-6777-285.

BENROY LTD.
trading as

Founded in 1944



The Abbey Stained Glass Studios

18 Old Kilmainham, Kilmainham, Dublin 8, Ireland.

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The East Window **St. James Church** **Dublin**

Telephone 6777285

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Michael O'Connor designed and fitted this beautiful stained glass window in St. James's Church, James's Street, Dublin in the year 1859.

St. James's Church is virtually on the grounds of the famous Guinness Brewery where recently there was a major accidental explosion in one of the brewing vats. Damage in the surrounding district was estimated in the millions of pounds.

The magnificent *East Window* over the altar in St. James's Church was reduced to tattered shreds of stained glass when it was sucked out of its frame by the blast, landing on the grounds of the brewery.

The problem of its repair—if it was at all possible—became the responsibility of the Church & General Insurance Company. They in turn invited **The Abbey Stained Glass Studios** to investigate the possibility of its restoration and repair. **The Abbey Stained Glass Studios**, with our fifty years of experience in the design and restoration of high quality stained glass, undertook the task and negotiated a contract through the Church & General Insurance Co .

We were recently invited by the prestigious *Stained Glass Quarterly of the Stained Glass Association of America*, who are celebrating their 90th Anniversary, to write an article for them on this restoration project. You will note that the editors have used their licence to "Americanise" many of the technical terms and spellings throughout the article.

The article explains in full detail the processes of restoration which were required; our artists and craftsmen take great pride in once again carrying out successfully the almost impossible task presented to us.

Ken Ryan,
The Abbey Stained Glass Studios,
Dublin

Directors: M. P. K. Ryan, M. A. Ryan



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SPECIALISTS IN ECCLESIASTICAL WORK

Designers and Manufacturers of Stained Glass

Restoration of Old and Damaged Stained Glass

- Stormglazing
- Dalle de Verre
- Opus Sectile
- Bronze Ventilators
- Glass Etching and Sandblasting
- Stations of the Cross

Recent Church Stained Glass Contracts at:

Enniscorthy Cathedral, Tuam Cathedral, Killarney Cathedral, Loughrea Cathedral, Ballina Cathedral, Cavan Cathedral, Pro-Cathedral, Black Abbey Kilkenny, Donnycarney, Ballygall Road, James' Street, Assisi House, Cabinteely, Arklow, Newtownpark Avenue, Lavagh, Upperchurch, Drombane, Mary Immaculate College, Drumcollogher, Raharney, Looscaun, Maree, Rossaveal, Furbo, St. Mary's College, Bekan, Ballyshannon, Ballyhaise, Virginia, Bantry, Rathnew, Milltown, Co. Kerry, Freshford, Monasterivan, Castlecomer, Milltownpass, Clonmel, Leixlip, Belclare, The Neale, Dalkey, Mount Sion, Allenwood, The Lough, Cork, Avoca, Ballymote, Tynagh, Tallaght, Mervue, Bluebell, Mercy International, Ballynacarrigy, Athy, Partry, Cashel, Bruff, Ferns, Our Lady's Island

Restoration of Harry Clarke Stained Glass at:

Lough Derg Basilica, Ballinrobe, Cong, Kilmaine, Newport, Co. Mayo, Vallemont, Bevedere College, Rochfortbridge, St. Columbanus Home, Wicklow Town, Tuam Cathedral, Cloughjordan, Kilrush, Franciscan Friary Killarney, Balbriggan, Donnybrook, Castleknock, St. Vincent's Fairview, Knockbridge, Millstreet Co. Cork, Kimmage Manor, Athlone, Terenure, Inchicore, Claremorris, Dingle, Ballindine, Bunnanadden, Drogheda, Carrickmacross, Ballyhaunis, Corduff, Timoleague, Belcamp College

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