

Shining through: the light of other days



Ken Ryan: has worked with Abbey Stained Glass Studios for 50 years

TONY O'SHEA

By Tina-Marie O'Neill

The Abbey Stained Glass Studios is the only major studio glass manufacturer of its kind in Ireland, and caters for a traditional ecclesiastical market.

A third-generation family business, the studio was established in 1944 by Frank and Tom Ryan and is now run by Frank's son, Ken.

Ken Ryan, a qualified quantity surveyor, spent 15 years as head of a construction company in Zimbabwe. "I was brought up in the

Ken Ryan

Company: The Abbey Stained Glass Studios

Position: managing director

Location: Dublin

stained glass business, so the jump didn't come as a shock," Ryan said.

Restoration accounts for 75 per cent of the studio's business. Up to 20 craftsmen and artists work under senior artist Kevin Kelly designing, manufacturing and restoring stained glass.

Kelly has worked with Abbey Studios for 50 years and can replicate the style of almost any stained glass artist. The studio also works on commissioned designs, most notably An Post's stained-glass design for its 1996 Christmas stamps. Kelly also designed a stained glass window to feature on a Unicef Christmas card.

Current projects include

the House of Prayer on Achill Sound in Mayo, Mount St Joseph's Abbey in Roscrea, Carlow Cathedral and Saint Patrick's Cathedrals in Dundalk and Maynooth. It recently completed a major contract for the Augustinian Fathers in Hammersmith in London.

The studio's most challenging project was St James Church in Dublin, said Ryan. Located next to the Guinness Brewery, the 150-year-old stained glass East Window of the church was smashed beyond recognition in a brewery explosion in 1996. Abbey Studios spent a

year salvaging, restoring and replacing glass to piece together the glass jigsaw. Craftsmen then had to cut, fit and solder the lead frame for the window based on slides of the original.

Abbey Studios specialises in restoring windows designed and manufactured by the late Harry Clarke, one of Ireland's most gifted stained glass artists.

"Every project is different," said Ryan. "But all artists and craftsmen derive great satisfaction out of creating a legacy in stained glass windows to leave behind them."