

SSG AGM and Conference 2016: Review

Review by Sarah McTiernan, MA student in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management

This year's Icon Stained Glass Group AGM took place on 1st-3rd September and was kindly hosted by the stained glass team at Canterbury Cathedral.

With its newly restored south window, skillfully reconstructed after reaching a point of imminent disaster, Canterbury Cathedral was the perfect location to focus on this year's topic: Disaster! Management, Recovery, Reconstruction, Opportunities.

The venue, Cathedral Lodge, was kindly provided at no extra cost by the Dean and Chapter and was the perfect space for a series of thought-provoking talks and fruitful discussions on the subject, as well as the AGM itself.

The first talk, The Great South Window of Canterbury Cathedral: Opportunities for Stone and Glass, was delivered by Heather Newton (Head of Stone Masonry and Conservation at Canterbury) and Léonie Seliger (Head of the Stained Glass Studio). They provided a fascinating insight into how disaster was averted after a stone fell from the 15th Century window, alerting staff to the worrying instability of the stonework and the resulting risk to both the precious 12th and 13th Century glass it housed and the people using the busy access point beneath it.

The talk explained in detail the process of managing this potential disaster and how the restoration led instead to a series of positive opportunities. The cathedral now has a secure and beautiful structure to house its precious glass for generations to come and a stronger, more experienced conservation team. The project also raised a deep level of awareness of stained glass and stone conservation through research and various exhibitions. Some panels even managed to tour in America during the rebuilding of the stonework!

The topic of opportunity arising from disaster was one that echoed throughout the conference. Gerard Burger from Glashütte Lamberts in Germany described the production challenges of creating a new 'disaster glass'; sheets with the texture and appearance of medieval glass, requested for a new project underway at Canterbury.

Merlyn Griffiths from the York Glaziers' Trust gave a talk on [Further Research into the Phenomenon Often Referred to as "Crizzling"](#). This informative account of the disastrous phenomenon left us musing on the opportunities for future research into managing the problem.

On the Friday, talks continued with Alexandra Jung's Responding to Disastrous Neglect: The Revival of a Church and the Impact of Its Stained Glass, the case of an abandoned church in Gutz, Landsberg, and the conservation of its remaining stained glass. Deciding to work with the artist Markus Lupertz raised huge public and media awareness and changed the fate of the building. Unconventionally, a hybrid of the old glass and a new contemporary style was created, a 21st Century reflection of the turbulent history of the church. Chris Chesney's amusing yet informative talk, Define Disaster, was based both on his experiences dealing with the effects of fire damage and how his studio worked to restore the 'original details' which had vanished from some early heraldry panels. With little original paint work and only silver stain remaining, a reversible method was used to recreate detail. This provoked further thought on the ethical concerns dealing with 'disasters' today, whether they occur suddenly or over a long period of time.

Finally, Léonie Seliger introduced us to the fire-damaged east window in the shrine of St Jude in Faversham. A window was restored after the disaster by the cathedral studio. They attempted to recreate it faithfully to

the original design despite a lack of good photographic records or original drawings. Léonie added the image of a phoenix into the work, a reminder that something beautiful can spring from the ashes of a disaster.

The talks were enriched by a programme of site visits that encompassed different aspects of Canterbury's stained-glass history, modern to ancient. Split into groups led by members of the studio team, we were given thoughtful insights and information whilst being led around the newly revealed south window (with one panel installed for our pleasure and edification), the stained glass studio and its current projects, old drawings of windows in the archives, and finally a tour around the cathedral glass itself. These short tours were the perfect culmination to two days of talks, the whole experience proving very conducive for further discussions. The icing on the cake came on Saturday, with a coach trip taking us on a whirlwind tour of some of Kent's hidden treasures: firstly, Aylesford Priory and its iridescent dalle de verre glass; then St Lawrence's Church, Mereworth, with its stunning heraldry panels; All Saints, Tudely, with its beautiful complete Marc Chagall glazing scheme; and finally, and quite aptly, the shrine of St Jude in Faversham.

There, we saw first-hand the beautifully restored fire-damaged east window described by Léonie the day before. The fire had allowed the monks at Faversham to rejuvenate the shrine, turning disaster into something positive. Seeing the phoenix added by Léonie, rising up at the bottom right-hand side of the window, was a perfect way to end the conference. It left us to ponder the thought that from disaster, through careful management in recovery and reconstruction, a range of positive opportunities can arise from the ashes.

Delegates were also able to view posters submitted and on display for the first Student & Emerging Professional Poster Competition (download the posters from this page). The posters were judged by delegates on effective communication and the visual impact, and the first prize was awarded to Emma Newman, MA in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management, for her poster, The Conservation of the East Window of Agher Parish Church.

A splendid three days, enjoyed by all. A debt of gratitude is owed to Canterbury for such a well-organised event!