

## New Stained-Glass windows for St Katharines Chapel at Leicester Cathedral.



These windows are being designed by Thomas Denny and are expected to be installed in 2016. Thomas Denny was born in London, and studied painting at Edinburgh College of Art in the 1970s. He has been responsible for some sixty stained glass commissions for churches and cathedrals, including the Traherne windows at Hereford Cathedral (2007), the Transfiguration window at Durham Cathedral (2010), and the Wisdom window at St Catharine's College Cambridge (2012). He combines the themes of Richard III with all our human experience and with bible references.

### ***The artist writes:***

The idea of installing a pair of stained-glass windows to fill the north wall of St Katherine's chapel is extremely exciting. The chapel is small and intimate, but also sumptuous in its fittings and decorative details. This intimacy and richness will be greatly enhanced by the proposed opening out of the Cathedral in which much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century taking in (by way of screens and choir stalls) will be removed, creating a lovely spaciousness, and, especially in the clustered columns at the crossing, regaining much of the architectural purity of the interior. St Katherine's chapel will thus represent a dramatic contrast in its enclosure with the grandeur of the space elsewhere.

The initial view of the two windows could be extraordinary, a sudden wall of colour in an emphatic relationship with the intended site of King Richard III's re – interment. One would then be able to enter the chapel and explore the glass at close quarters; over repeated visits, new narrative detail and surface interest could be discovered.

The light in St Katherine's chapel is affected by the fairly near presence of red brick buildings on the other side of the lane. Sometimes the light is reduced but often an even glowing reflected light bounces off the buildings and through the north windows of the chapel. It is right that the colours used in the new glass should respond well to this situation. Warmth and intensity of colour should, as it were, draw light into the chapel. The predominance of pink/gold hues elsewhere in the cathedral – especially in the arts and crafts east window – would also suggest the use of such colours.

Other works of art and materials in the chapel are sympathetic neighbours, a nice harmonious assemblage. The existing 20<sup>th</sup> century east window there would be a good companion, its modesty and delicacy of colour – silver stain yellows and muted cerulean – very readily accepting something more intense nearby.

As well as thinking about what is there in arriving at decisions about the new glass, I think that it is essential for a stained-glass artist, in placing a new work in an ancient setting, to work on to develop and

adjust and enrich the surfaces and textures of the glass. This may make something intrinsically interesting, but it also (as a happy by product) makes glass that is in tune with surrounding ancient stone glass, carved and painted wood..!

How would these windows be made? All of the materials and most of the processes to be employed are as found in windows from the time of Richard III, or from the nineteenth century. Leadlines have their own rhythmic quality that can re-iterate rhythms in the colour and light of the glass; the subdivision of glass by lead also reduces the assertiveness of very large sheets of glass. Acid etching, whereby a variety of tones within a piece of coloured glass is achieved, can be especially interesting if the artist is using two layers of glass, of different colours, treated in this way. The addition of glass paint and stain develops form, description and tonality.

Stained-glass I believe, should always be experienced initially as something operating purely in terms of colour and light, an abstract or 'musical' medium, which then begins to reveal narrative and the depiction of things.

These windows are designed to commemorate the finding of King Richard III's remains in Leicester in 2012 and his re interment (just like other medieval monarchs such as John and Edward II) near to the place of his death.

In theme they represent an interweaving of history and spirituality, and suggest the idea of a particular life as embodying, for all of us, themes from scripture. History; Life; the possibility of revelations; encountering god – these things run together through the various sections of the windows, and there is no separation, essentially, between them.

### **Westerly Window**



In the left hand light of the westerly window we see the aftermath of a battle, women approaching the dead and dying: 'what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy' (Micah 6:8). This could be Bosworth, but here and elsewhere the figures and spaces are generic rather than historic; place and time are not pinned down.



Further up, a horse is led through the streets of a city, the body of a man slung over its back (just as was done to Richard III after Bosworth). Some citizens are full of mockery: 'The scorers delight in their scorning' (Proverbs 1:22). But beyond is a suggestion of two spires, St Martins, perhaps, where Richard's body found sanctuary: 'In your dwelling you keep them safe' (Psalm 31:20)



The right hand light is about hidden-ness and being known, about death and burial, but 'before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you' (Jeremiah 1:5). People are passing to and fro by two rose bushes, whose roots infiltrate the ground, a ground representing layers of time and stories, and containing the bones of one long hidden. Artefacts of succeeding periods are embedded in the earth – 'Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, for thy dew is as the dew of herbs and the earth shall cast out the dead' (Isaiah 26:19)



In the central light, these themes of carnage and death, of humiliation, and of burial and sanctuary, are gathered into an encounter with the risen Christ: two disciples, walking on the road to Emmaus, meet the as yet unknown figure of Jesus.



In the two central sections of the tracery above, the story continues so resurrection is at the heart of this window. Other Tracery sections contain places from King Richard III's life: two figure ride in front of a castle (Middleham, perhaps); three children run by the tower of Fotheringay church.

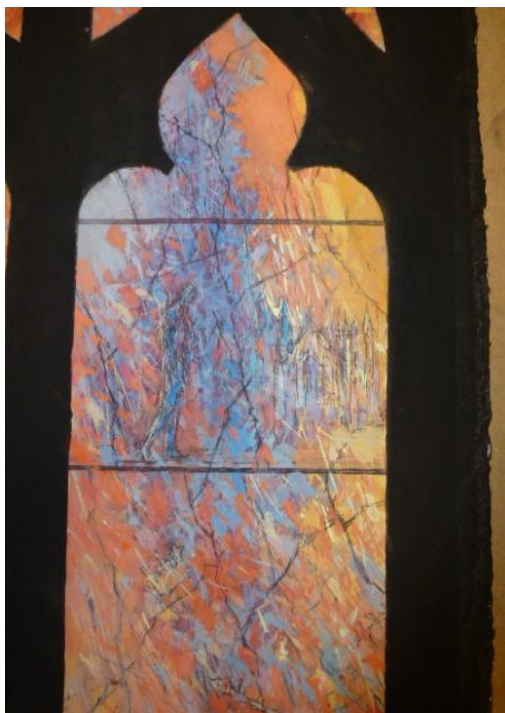
## Easterly Window



The easterly window has something of the same organisation. In the left hand light, a figure is on the verge of a dangerous and frightening journey into 'the valley of the shadow of death'. He must pass first through the tangle of thorns. Courage and trust in god may be his: 'I had fainted unless I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord... Be of good courage and he shall strengthen thy heart' (Psalm 27:13-14).



This and the right hand light we think of suffering, loss and loneliness: 'I will speak in the anguish of my spirit' (job 7:11). A child has died, and his parents kneel in terrible grief – 'he's gone, and all our plans are useless indeed'. Richard III and his wife Anne Neville, were, in the words of a contemporary 'almost out of their minds for a long time' at the death of their son Edward.



Soon, Anne died too. In the upper part of the light, a solitary figure, the trappings of royalty cast aside, approaches the place of his wife's burial.



There is, perhaps, some comfort in the central light, some healing reconciliation forgiveness. A damaged man fragments from the story of his life scattered below him (letters, papers) stands in despair. Christ comes to him: 'he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted' (Luke 4:18). On the hill behind is an empty cross: 'but now in Christ Jesus, you who sometimes were far off, were made nigh by the blood of Christ' (Ephesians 2:13).



In the tracery again, are glimpses from Richard's life: a kingdom (an oak tree; Nottingham Castle); the ferocity of a battle; a boar and a rider, two towers – Kirby Muxloe and Tewkesbury.

In Ireland, history is never separated from contemporary life. Perhaps in England this is less so. But with Richard III there does seem to be an extraordinary and unexpected feeling of closeness, of history being almost within touching. In Leicester itself the excitement is remarkable. In many ways, as a figure from a divided and destructive England, Richard could embody themes of overcoming animosity, of acceptance of one another as we are! And his life stories could well encompass those of any of us: loss, anguish, division, love, being reviled, being acclaimed.

Incidentally there is an interesting and quite intimate fragment among the possessions of my father, that brings our family, in a convoluted way, back to Richard III. In 1483 Richard attempted to reconcile the Fitzgerald Earls of Desmond, a family treated with harsh treachery by his brother Edward IV. As part of his mission to the Desmonds Richard sent them a jewel in the form of a boar, his emblem. The Desmonds, Norman Irish Potentates from South West Ireland, subsequently adopted the boar as their own emblem. It appears for example on an early sixteenth century tile from the Desmonds home in County Kerry, a place which then became for over three hundred years, the home of their supplanters, the Dennys (also, however, their descendants) – see illustration.

And it is interesting, perhaps, that the designer of their windows can claim Kinship with King Richard by way of two separate descents from his mother's brother Richard Neville, one from his uncle Edward Neville, one from his father's sister Isabel Plantagenet, and in addition, at least eleven descent from earlier Plantagenet's.

Thomas Denny October 2013