

## The new 'St Roch East Window' - Planning

The Church of St Roch in the tiny hamlet of Pendomer would appear to be a particularly blessed place. Despite the small size of the parish the church has maintained a regular group of worshippers over the years, with many people from the surrounding villages coming here for the peace, welcome and fellowship that this beautiful corner of South Somerset enjoys.

In 1980 Ernest Sandiford, who lived in Hardington, left his estate to the church, which enabled vital work to be carried out. The roof was renovated, the walls, especially the South wall, re-pointed and rendered waterproof, the floor renewed, the old (worm-eaten!) pine screen removed, the Victorian green glass replaced with antique style clear glass and diamond leading, and a new organ installed. The heating and lighting were renewed, and the church was a secure and comfortable building for the foreseeable future, with some funds left in reserve for future needs.

Churchwarden Bill Whetham loved his church, and felt, after all these practical works, that we should celebrate our faith and God's love with something of beauty. A new East window seemed the best way to do this, and three artists were given the task of submitting a suitable design. The stunning portrayal of the Patron Saint, St Roch, by Stewart Bowman stood head and shoulders above the other two artist's works. An unusual patron saint in Britain, he is shown in the central panel during his time in the forest suffering from the plague, with representations of the changing seasons, and the dog, which turned out to be his saviour by bringing bread from its master's table at his feet. In the left panel we see him giving his money to the poor, after renouncing his estate prior to his trip to Italy, and in the right panel the angel is healing the boil in his thigh. For more of his story see the Church booklet, and appendix I for Stewart Bowman's comments.



The initial design included new work in the traceries at the top of the window. We had an idea that some of this glass was quite old, and intended to keep it in some form. An informal approach was made to the Diocesan Advisory Committee and Archdeacon Dick Acworth, who were very supportive of the idea, and the subject of Faculty application to carry out the work discussed. Soon after this a new member of the church raised theological arguments against the project, as a result of which it was put 'on ice' for some time. Eventually the situation changed and the then churchwardens Robin and Sheila Carpenter decided to try to resurrect it. (By this time the artist was getting somewhat frustrated, as he considered the design to be one of his best.)

Further discussions with the DAC revealed various facts about the medieval glass in the traceries. Firstly that it was considered to be of considerable importance (see appendix 2), and should stay in situ, though vital conservation work was required. Secondly that during this work the bright red, blue and yellow Victorian glass should be removed as it was considered rather garish, and would certainly clash with the colours of the proposed new window. (It is generally assumed that the medieval fragments were recovered and re-set in the Victorian era, with the gaps filled with the bright colours, no doubt considered at the time to be the best option).

Stewart Bowman was therefore asked to modify his design without his proposals for the traceries, which he was able to do without undue compromise. He was going to be working with Glasswood, from Barrington near Ilminster, who would fit his new work. The DAC did not consider that this company had the necessary expertise to do the conservation work to the medieval glass, so tenders were invited. The quotation from Canterbury Studios, under the direction of Dr Sebastian Strobl, was the best, so was accepted. Dr Strobl strongly recommended that isothermal secondary glazing should be used, as the best 'state of the art' system to preserve the fragile glass. The Bath and Wells DAC were, however, adamant that this should not be used, so we accepted the situation.



The project proceeded to the point of faculty application, but a major hurdle now reared its head - the DAC insisted that the heavy ferramenta in the East window should be retained. It can reasonably be assumed that these were installed in the Victorian era, and consisted of heavy saddle bars supporting thick verticals with a finial design on the top running up the centre of each light. The DAC considered them to be an important integral part of the church, but the artist had assumed he would have a 'clean slate' on which to work. Though the possibility of compromise was discussed, including partial removal of the ferramenta and/or alteration of the basic new design, it was clear to us and Stewart Bowman that the whole project would not be viable if we agreed to the DAC's wishes. The application was therefore submitted specifying removal of the ferramenta from the East window, and also conservation work not only to the East window, but also to the traceries in the windows to the South of the chancel and in the North vestry wall. Thankfully the application was granted, but only after referral to a consistory court!

Fund-raising for the new window now began in earnest, and this proved in the main most enjoyable. Major earners for the cause were Bam Dances at Parsonage Farm, a sponsored Olympic triathlon (completed by David Thomson from Hardington, Judy Beattie from West Coker and yours truly) and a series of concerts in the church. A substantial donation was also made by the George Eyre charitable trust. At the same time the bodies which had already been approached with promising replies for grant aid towards the conservation work were contacted again. The St Andrew's Conservation Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation and the Worshipful Company of Glaziers all promised substantial amounts. The Council for the Care of Churches also advised us that a substantial grant would be available, but on two conditions. They wanted us to retain all the Victorian glass, and insisted that the isothermal glazing, as recommended by Dr Strobl, should be used, This put us in somewhat of a quandary. The amount of money at stake was vital, but the conditions were opposite to those imposed by our DAC! After a number of difficult discussions, meetings and correspondence it was finally agreed between the DAC and the CCC that isothermal glazing would be used to protect the restored medieval glass, and the bright Victorian fragments retained in the vestry and South chancel windows, but removed from the East window.



Later in the year the medieval glass was removed in its entirety and taken to the glass studios at Canterbury. Richard Terrell, our church architect Peter Bird and myself paid a visit to see and discuss the work in progress in September 2004, and it was refitted in April 2005. The style and colour of the pieces of glass used to replace the bright Victorian panes was perfect, making a harmonious whole of the new window and restored traceries. It was also very good to see the head of Christ in the topmost tracery complete after so many years with only one eye and no top to his head! The new piece here, though an excellent match, has been carefully but subtly marked to distinguish it from the medieval glass.

The service of dedication was arranged for October 20th 2005, as this was the earliest date in Bishop Peter's diary. It gave the Benefice Choir plenty of time to practice the specially written anthem by Crewkerne composer Brian Daniels.

No conditions or suggestions had been made by the DAC as to what should happen to the removed Victorian fragments. As my sister Jane Carpenter is herself not only a gifted artist, but also trained in stained glass techniques, I asked her if she would like to make something of these pieces, which proved to be small in size and many in number! The 'Tree of Life' now in the church is the result, and she has written her thoughts, which led to this beautiful creation in appendix 3.

Robin Carpenter, Churchwarden, October 2005