

medieval colours. The more you delve into it, the longer you look at it, the more can be seen - especially in different periods of daylight, and in both winter and summer. Stained glass is the only art form, from painting and sculpture to tapestry and jewellery, is designed to be appreciated by *reflected* light.

The Art Historian, Nicola Gordon Bowe*, describes Harry Clarke as having:

"absorbed Burne-Jones, Beardsley, Charles Ricketts, Edmund Dulac, Kay Nielsen, the Glasgow School, the Japanese print, the Symbolists, and the Russian Ballet."

Costume historians find this window of immense interest, too, with the Fortuny-styled pleated dresses, the pearl hairnets, the jewels, the Art Deco shoes and the galaxy of tassels, all in such beguiling colours.

From the day of his death in 1931 there was no public exhibition of Harry Clarke's work until 1988: then exhibitions were mounted in London, the USA and Dublin. Now the art world are again enthusing about him, everywhere. One commentator recently said of him:

"his skill and vision in glass have never been equalled in this century, and provide a bridge with the masterpieces of the medieval cathedrals."

We are extremely fortunate to have this unique window in our Parish Church, together with the four others mentioned above. A Hardman, a Webb, two Lowndes and a Clarke are a veritable treasure-trove to find in one location.

***The *Life and Work of Harry Clarke*, by Nicola Gordon Bowe, published by the Irish Academic Press 1989.**

**THE STAINED GLASS WINDOWS IN ST MARY'S CHURCH.
STURMINSTER NEWTON, DORSET.
by Nancy Armstrong FRSA**

There are eight stained glass memorial windows in this church. Three are in a bad state; one is a competent factory production; two, unusually, are by a woman and the rarest is by the Dublin artist - Harry Clarke.

The East window, over the altar, was made in 1865 by the Birmingham firm of John Hardman & Co., and shows a central theme of "Christ in Majesty". Six scenes, clearly labelled, show the "acts of Mercy" and amongst the remainder of subjects is a single lily, symbolising the purity of the Virgin Mary, to whom this church is dedicated. The inscription reads:
AD 1865 TO THE GLORY OF GOD/ AND IN LOVING MEMORY OF
HIM/ WILLIAM LOFTUS LOWNDES/ WHO RESEATED THIS
CHANCEL/ THIS WINDOW IS DEDICATED.

The North Aisle window is by Geoffrey Webb. (1879-1954), made in 1911. He signed it with a picture of a tiny spider in its web (and MCMXI) in the bottom left light. The general theme shows Christ's "Crucifixion", yet we also see St Martin dividing his cloak with a beggar. The window is dedicated to a member of the Mansel-Pleydell family (very well known in Dorset) who was in the Royal Horse Artillery and who died in India. Curiously enough, his twin brother (in the Royal Field Artillery) died six years later in the first World War, and details about him are on the window ledge below. Common to both, therefore, is the artillery cannon in the right hand light. Their father was Vicar here during that time, and he commissioned the window.

There are two windows by Mary Lowndes (1857-1927). She was Britain's first woman stained glass maker. She created the "Nativity" high up in the West Tower in memory of her mother, Elizabeth. It was the first window she ever made. The "Resurrection", in the South Chapel, was to commemorate her father, Canon Richard Lowndes, who was Vicar here for some 36 years. It is in an "Arts and Crafts" style.

Mary Lowndes, a lifelong feminist, became a pioneer, both in "Arts and Crafts" stained glass, and for general "Womens' Rights". She founded the firm of Lowndes and Drury, whose premises in Fulham, London, have been used by many glaziers from the end of the 19th century to the present day. These two windows by her (and Isobel Gloag) are the most personal she ever made.

The final window commemorates another Sturminster Newton family, the Spencer-Smiths.

Sir Drummond Spencer-Smith was an officer in the Royal Artillery (the "Chestnut Troop") who eventually travelled to New Zealand to become ADC to the Governor-General there. He met a beautiful red-headed girl, Roma Hope of Timaru (half-way down the east coast of South Island) and they became engaged. Their marriage was in London. Then Sir Drummond took Roma to live with his mother at historic Vine House in Sturminster Newton. Roma became a nurse during the first World War, working at St Thomas' Hospital in London. Within four years of marriage Roma died - a victim of the dreadful 'flu epidemic'. It was doubly tragic, for by then Roma and Drummond had an eleven-month-old baby son.

Remarkably, the extremely controversial artist, Harry Clarke of Dublin (1889-1931) was invited to design and make Roma's memorial window.

Harry Clarke was then 32, a strict Catholic, had won several major design competitions - but worked (in stained glass as well as book illustrations) mainly in Ireland. Previously he had made only one window for a Protestant church. Many prominent people considered his work bizarre, especially his book illustrations, and the enigma of his commission remains unsolved.

Harry Clarke worked fast with his pure Art Deco design. He chose three women saints for his scene, standing them in a frieze of equal height, shoulder to shoulder, on a fringed cope for a background: this must have deeply shocked the conventional rural congregation of 1921, for traditionally the Virgin should stand alone - or above mortals.

So centrally, we see the Virgin and Child, partly because the church is dedicated to the Virgin Mary and partly because the window is in memory of young Roma Spencer-Smith. We cannot fail to remember her baby, for the Child is a portrait of her young son. Roma is now buried in the "lower graveyard", together with the ashes of Sir Drummond and also those of their only child.

On the left is St Elizabeth of Hungary, the Patron Saint of nursing, linking her to Roma. On the right is St Barbara, the Patron Saint of artillerymen, which links her to Sir Drummond.

St Elizabeth was dedicated to helping the poor and needy. Harry Clarke's depiction of her was based on a portrait of Roma, using her features and red hair - not many stained glass saints have red hair . . . The Saint took bread to the hungry, but her husband considered that she was too charitable. One day, when going out to feed the needy, she was faced by her distrustful husband who was trying to catch her out - but miraculously the small loaves of bread she carried in her cloak turned into roses, as you can see.

Beautiful St Barbara (another portrait - this time of Harry Clarke's own wife) had a father who was a fanatic pagan. Barbara, however, converted to Christianity - so her furious father imprisoned her in a tower (you can see it behind her), where she defiantly studied Christianity all day long (did you notice her book? And the feathered quill in the Angel's hand?). Eventually her father reported Barbara to the authorities, who condemned her to torture and death - and *her own father* volunteered to carry out the sentence! On his return home, Barbara's father was killed by a bolt of lightning. This the reason why artillerymen chose her as their Patron Saint, because of the noise and flash of light when their own guns go off: a cannon is visible by Barbara's foot.

Harry Clarke designed and made the extremely rare window by himself (there are 56 feet of glass in it) in his workshops in Dublin, using all the ancient "slab-glass" techniques in a brilliant way, signing and dating it in the bottom right-hand light. It is immediately obvious that he had studied at Chartres Cathedral, amongst other places, copying the gloriously rich