

Stained Glass Windows Commemorating the New Hartley Pit Disaster 1862

Abstract

There is much written and recorded from the time and since the pit disaster at New Hartley in 1862 and this wealth of information became the basis of the research for the window. Two stained glass windows were designed for the church of St Alban's Earsdon telling the story of the pit disaster. The two windows represent the theme of 'death' for the left hand window and 'resurrection' for the right hand window, the darkness on the one hand and the light on the other.

Main text

Death Window

This window is designed in wintery cool greys and blue colours with only minimal use of other colours. The use of a colourless and slightly textured handmade crown or roundel at the top of the window is to remind us of the moon, darkness and perpetual night. The leading in this part of the design also represents leafless branches on lifeless bare trees. The window shows a central clear 'shaft' running down through the design echoing the single shaft that became blocked with the wreckage of the beam, preventing the escape of the miners. As the viewer's eye follows the shaft down it is intended to give a feeling of going down into the ground with the leading representing the layers of strata on either side of the shaft. The large area of black glass studded with yellow crosses which dominates the bottom part of the window represents the lost miners and where they died. There are 204 glinting yellow crosses representing the 204 souls who died that day. Written on the glass at what appears to be the bottom of the 'shaft' is a line taken from Psalm 139:12. The whole verse reads:

O Lord the darkness is not dark to thee,
the night is as bright as the day,
for the darkness is as light with thee

The writing is not meant to dominate the work but to tonally blend with the rest of the design. It is intended that from a distance the yellow crosses will be seen and as the viewer approaches the work then the words start to appear.

Resurrection Window

The feel of this window is richer, brighter and celebratory with a summer lightness about the whole panel. The sweeping lead lines move the viewer's eye up through the window to focus on the roundel specially made for the commission in bright translucent gold, glowing like the sun raiding warmth at the top of the window. The leading depicts leaf like shapes, representing life and new growth. The colours are rich and warming and are in stark contrast to those of the other panel. This window also contains a line from the traditional funeral service. The whole verse reads:

Rest eternal grant unto them O Lord
And let light perpetual shine upon them
May they rest in peace and rise in glory

Again the words are intended to be read as the viewer approaches the panel.

General Notes

The windows were designed and made by Cate Watkinson. Each window is made up in a selection of different types of glass from many different European manufacturers, for example Tatra Glass in Poland and Lamberts Glass in Germany. However all the glass used is handmade, including some very old Hartley Wood glass saved from the factory in Sunderland before its closure in the late 1990's. Some glass is particularly interesting, for example, some of the pink glass used in the resurrection window is made with gold salts which give it a unique richness and quality. The window also contains a great deal of glass which is has been hand made especially for the commission. Colin Rennie and James Maskrey at the University of Sunderland glass department have contributed their expertise in the making of roundels which have been either used whole of cut and leaded into the work. The glass depicting the 204 crosses was made with the use of cutting edge technology, the crosses being painstaking cut out using a waterjet cutter and then fused to an amber sheet of glass. Waterjet and fused glass can also be seen in the resurrection panel. This technique is new has not been used before with stained glass.