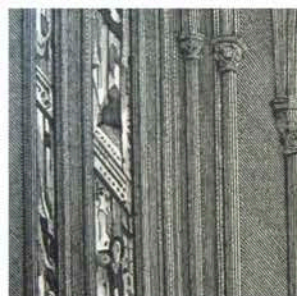


The Steinfeld Abbey Cloister Glazing: An Investigation into its Dispersal and Condition

Katie Harrison, Dissertation research for the MA in Stained Glass Conservation and Heritage Management

Overview

The Steinfeld Abbey cloister glazing was one of many continental stained glass schemes dispersed during the early nineteenth-century, with much destined for the United Kingdom. This study adopted a multi-disciplinary, conservation-focused approach to provide a new perspective on the dispersal of stained glass panels from Steinfeld Abbey. Not only were new insights provided into the effects of dispersal on the conservation history of the panels, more light was also shed on the practices of dealers, purchasers and glaziers in the periods under consideration. Crucially, comparison of the extant panels with one another highlighted significant differences in condition that may indicate where intervention will be required in future conservation projects.



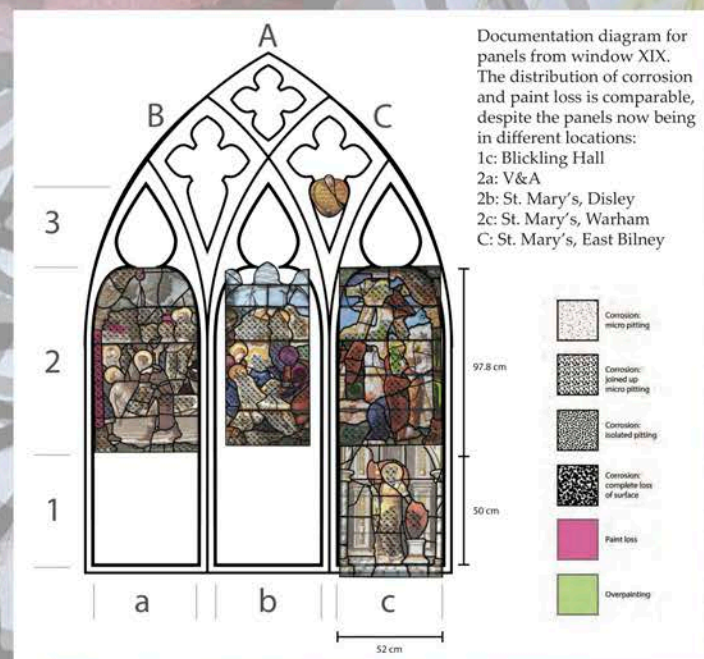
Detail of 'Interior of the chapel, Ashridge; looking towards the altar', showing Steinfeld panels in upper registers of XIII (Todd, 1823) (left) and window XVII, panel 1b, Victoria and Albert Museum, London (©Victoria and Albert Museum) (right). The seated figure of St. John on Patmos is clearly visible in the etching.

Key Findings and Future Research

This investigation has shed light on the practices of nineteenth-century traders and restorers of glass, as well as raised questions regarding the motives of purchasers, suggesting several areas that might inform future research. Investigations into the interconnectedness of purchasers of Steinfeld stained glass, particularly in combination with more detailed comparisons of post-dispersal insertions and reused fragments, have the potential to establish the pattern of dispersal more clearly.

Whilst this examination has not conclusively proven the existence of extensive micro-pitting before the dispersal of the glass, the array of evidence in favour of this hypothesis is highly suggestive. It is also evident that the different environments to which the glass has been exposed after dispersal has led to further deterioration, which is specific to these locations.

The surprising lack of corrosion on the external surfaces, as well as the extensive micro-pitting on the interior, is significant both for the conservation of the glass, as well as for understanding the effects of environment and glass composition upon corrosion. It also suggests that a comparable study of all of the extant glass would be able to provide further valuable insights into its condition, dispersal and future conservation needs.



Methodology

In combination with archival research, an essential element of the study was the close examination of a sample of extant panels, which, when analysed in the context of their divergent histories, allowed trends in condition phenomena to be identified and the impact of dispersal upon the condition of the glass established. Extant panels from seven of the Steinfeld cloister windows were studied, consisting of thirty-five panels and fragments at ten different locations around the United Kingdom. As around half the extant panels, now in the Victoria & Albert Museum, London, have the same post-1802 history, the windows selected for study all included at least one panel from the museum. This approach has the potential to provide new insights, not only into the mechanisms of dispersal, and the contemporary practice of the individuals involved, but also to identify condition phenomena which may inform the future conservation of the extant panels.

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A fragment at St Mary Magdalene's, Warham, depicting the edge of a cope looks as though it belongs to window XII panel 1a, now at St Cadoc's, Glynneath. Given the early date of installation at Warham, this could mean that the St Cadoc panel passed through the workshop of the Warham restorer, most likely Yarrington, at the same date.

Detail of window XII, panel 1a, east window, St. Cadoc's, Glynneath, the lower portion of the donor's clothing has been replaced (left). Detail of a fragment at St. Mary Magdalene's, Warham, depicting the edge of a cope (right).

