

The proposed new St. Alphege stained glass window for Bath Abbey

I was originally given the brief below to consider for the new stained glass window in Bath Abbey. Following my initial considerations, the inspiration for the design is a culmination of the concepts below, in conjunction with extensive discussions with members of the clergy and the Abbey community. The design also takes into consideration the aspect of the north facing window, by using the strongest colours in the border and more subtle colours within the design to maximize the light passing through the window.

The Brief

1. St Alphege (he became a Martyr and Archbishop of Canterbury 1000 years ago). Born in Weston, Bath
2. A House of Prayer for All Nations. Bath Abbey welcomes thousands of visitors from around the world each year and we invite them to pray here
3. Fountain of Life (The Waters of Bath). The City of Bath is famous for two waters, Bath Spa Water and the River Avon.

The proposed new stained glass window combines all of these elements into a cohesive and striking design. Following the various meetings and the development of earlier designs, it was decided to pursue a contemporary interpretation that reflects the progressive direction of the Abbey.

1. St Alphege is the centrepiece of the window and depicts Alphege with his arms uplifted to the Lord at the suggestion of the Rector Guy Bridgewater. I feel that the Fountain of Life in the form of the spa waters of Bath could also reflect the uplifted arms in a dynamic vertical way to show the energy of the water, effervescing in the upper sections.
2. A House of Prayer for all Nations. How to create an all inclusive House of Prayer for all Nations? My designs are the result of extensive consultation about how this might be achieved. We came up with the concept of the border which shows numerous colourful elements of flags from around the world, without being too specific but are representational, as there are 195 countries with flags. This concept will effectively frame the window.
3. As mentioned above, the Fountain of Life is a vertical force of "living water" referencing the spa waters, that echo the uplifted arms of Alphege. In addition, the upper section references the River Avon with a quote from the Bible, again at the suggestion of the Rector Guy Bridgewater. "Out of him will flow rivers of living water". (John 7; 37-39)

The selection of the palette takes into consideration the north facing aspect of the Chancel window in order to maximize the transmission of light. There will be a direct colour reference to the windows either side of the proposed window which is currently in plain glass, in the Sanctuary called "The Alphege Chapel". The East wall of the Chapel depicts the existing coloured stained glass window of the Coronation of Edgar, which took place in 973. In addition, it will take into consideration the colour and detailing from the window to the left of the proposed window, which also faces north.

Traditional stained glass techniques will be used in the manufacture process, in conjunction with more cutting edge fired and sandblasted glass which will simulate liquid water effervescing within the glass. Examples of specific types of glass have been provided.

The stained glass window will be manufactured using the highest quality materials of mouth-blown glass, lead came etc, reflecting age old techniques but with a contemporary interpretation.

In order to give the impression of liquid water, we aim to create completely original effects by firing the glass in the kiln and also sandblasting various areas within the window to give this impression. The installation of the window will be carried out on both sides with scaffolding support but will primarily be from within the Abbey, to complete the installation into the stonework using lime mortar.

The complete installation process has previously been specified.

Thank you for your kind attention.
Neil Ireson

A selection of Ecclesiastical stained glass installations

- St Georges Chapel. Weybridge, Surrey (14 contemporary windows, each 3 meters high)
- Josephite Community 200th Anniversary Memorial window, Surrey
- Congregational Church, Kentish Town, London (8 contemporary windows)
- Hospice Chapel. Woking, Surrey
- St Ursuline Chapel. Wimbledon, London
- Marlborough College, Heritage window.
- Private Chapel. Henley on Thames
- Buddhist Temple Dome, Mile End, London
- St James Church, Surrey
- United Reform Church, Surrey