

THE HERALDIC WINDOW IN THE FRECHEVILLE CHAPEL OF STAVELEY CHURCH

By J. T. BRIGHTON.

DERBYSHIRE is not a county rich in ancient stained glass and it is thus with pride that Staveley Church treasures its rare 17th century Frecheville window. Yet although this fine three-light heraldic window has existed in the Chantry Chapel for almost three hundred years its origin has long been an enigma and it is only since 1952 that its true identity has been established.

For long the window has been held to be of foreign workmanship. Dr. J. C. Cox for instance wrote: "It is said that this window was imported from France."¹ He was obviously repeating an oral tradition of the time. More recently the late Dr. A. Court simply followed Cox's uncritical acceptance of tradition when he wrote: "This window . . . is the only one of its kind in the country . . . It is said to have been imported from France."²

In 1952 the problem was solved quite accidentally. Canon H. Dibben, who was then rector, seeing the derelict state of the window, decided to restore it. Following the advice of the present Dean of York, E. Milner-White, a recognized authority on ancient glass, he employed Mr. J. A. Knowles, a noted craftsman and writer on stained glass, to carry out the work of renovation.³ This was indeed a fortunate choice for Mr. Knowles immediately identified the window when he looked behind Lord Frecheville's tomb (which partially obscures the base of the window) and saw faintly painted in the bottom left-hand corner of the central pane the inscription "Henricus Gyles faciebat". This Henry Gyles (1645-1709) was a York

¹ J. C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, I, 358.

² A. Court, *Staveley, My Native Town*, 1946, 11.

³ J. A. Knowles, *A History of the York School of Glass Painting*, S.P.C.K., 1936.

glazier, and Mr. Knowles has not only studied and renovated his works but has also written a monograph on him.⁴ Mr. Knowles' published works contain nothing on the Frecheville window since he was not aware of its existence until 1952. With his help and encouragement then this article sets out to remedy to some degree the omission.

Since 1952 illustrations of the window have appeared in various works on English Stained Glass and the Staveley window, once unknown outside the locality, is now cited as perhaps the most important surviving work of Henry Gyles. It is not my intention here to give a brief biography of Gyles but rather to comment more specifically on the Frecheville window and to investigate its history.

In the 17th century the art of glass-staining and painting was not only being debased and forgotten, but in an age of growing Puritanism it was being strongly discouraged, especially in its hagiographic forms. Artists were few and struggled to obtain commissions which were chiefly of an heraldic nature. Henry Gyles was no exception. His output was comparatively small and few of his works have survived. Of the eighteen works known to have been executed at Oxford and Cambridge Colleges, in and around York itself, and at Staveley, only twelve remain in a fragmentary or restored state, all of which are in Yorkshire with the exception of the Arms of Queen Anne in one of the windows in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the Frecheville window.

How then did the heraldic window come to be installed in the Parish Church of Staveley? How did Henry Gyles obtain a commission from Lord John Frecheville? We have no direct written evidence as far as I know to answer these questions but the facts of Lord John's distinguished career serve to give us an answer. He could have come into contact with Gyles' work or more directly with the artist himself in a number of ways. Gyles' work was known outside York; works had been commissioned from him by Colleges at Oxford and Cambridge and his friends acted as commission-agents for him in London. Indeed

⁴ J. A. Knowles, "Henry Gyles, Glass Painter of York", *The Walpole Society*, II, 1922-3, 48-64.

it is from one of his friends in London, William Lodge, that we have a letter referring vaguely to some transactions with "my Lord Frecheville".⁵

However, the most obvious connexion between Frecheville and Gyles no doubt arose in York, for it was in 1660 that Charles II appointed Frecheville to the governorship of the city in recognition of his services in the Civil War.⁶ Nor was the post a sinecure, for we find Frecheville present in York quite frequently in the years between his appointment and his death in 1682.⁷ Thus he doubtless became directly acquainted with Gyles during this period, and, having seen his work, commissioned him to paint an heraldic window when, in 1665, Charles II further rewarded him with the title of Baron Frecheville of Staveley.

The window is quite clearly dated; in the bases of both the supporting panes is the same inscription: "Dom. Iohannes Fr. Baro de Staley posuit 1676" (Plate XI). There appears to be no doubt that the window was painted at this date and, this being so, it is Gyles' second earliest surviving work after the sundial window in Nun Appleton Hall near York (dated 1670).

Moreover the window has a third date in cursive script on a scroll at the base of the central pane. This is now incomplete and reads: "Caroli a Carolo XXVIII°". Mr. Knowles informed me that when he restored the window the bottom left-hand pane of the window had been broken out. As he had no documentary evidence to suggest how the beginning of the inscription had been originally worded, he simply replaced the pane with a blank fragment of the scroll painted on it. Since then I have found evidence of the complete inscription in the "Derbyshire Church Notes" of John Reynolds taken in 1757.⁸ The inscription read: "A° Regni Caroli a Carolo XXVIII°".

The heraldry of the Frecheville window is not without interest, and since time has in places left the tinctures and metals of the various coats somewhat indistinct, and

⁵ *The Walpole Society*, X, 64.

⁶ A. C. Wood, "John, Lord Frecheville of Staveley", *D.A.J.*, LIII (1932).

⁷ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic 1660-82*.

⁸ J. Reynolds, "Derbyshire Church Notes", *Collectanea Topographica*, I, 1834.

John Reynolds' earlier notes on the window contain more than one error, I will give the arms here in their original colours.

The two supporting lights each contain two coats of arms. In the top of the easternmost light are the arms of Frecheville (*azure a bend between six escallops argent*) impaling Nicholls (*azure a fess between three lions' heads erased or langued gules*). This commemorates Lord John's first marriage to Bruce, daughter of Francis Nicholls of Amptill in Bedfordshire. In the base of this same light are the arms of Frecheville alone.

In the westernmost light at the top are the arms of Frecheville impaling de Vick (*or three caltraps sable on a chief azure a lion's head erased or langued gules*). This coat denotes Lord John's third marriage to Anne Charlotte, daughter of Sir Henry de Vick. In the base of this same pane is the coat of Frecheville with an inescutcheon of Harrington (*sable a fret argent*) commemorating his second marriage to Sarah, daughter of John Harrington of Bagworth.

Besides blazoning the arms incompletely, Reynolds appears to have confused them since he places the arms of Frecheville and of Frecheville with the inescutcheon of pretence in the wrong panes. Mr. Knowles certainly did not alter the position of the coats of arms and there appears to be no evidence of anyone having done so previously; consequently we can only conclude that Reynolds had made a mistake.

The larger central light of the window contains the full achievement of Lord John with the supporters, crest and motto, and a shield of eleven quarterings. To blazon these arms in their correct tinctures they are:

1. Frecheville.
2. *Or 2 Chevrons azure* (Musard-FitzRalph).
3. *Gules 3 annulets or* (Musard).
4. *Ermine on a bend azure 3 cinquefoils or*
(Beaufey).
5. *Gules 6 cocks (3.2.1) or* (Nuthill).
6. *Azure a lion rampant within an orle of*
Cross-crosslets or (Bruse).

7. *Checky or and azure, on an inescutcheon argent
a bend gules* (Trehampton).
8. *Or 3 lions passant in pale gules* (Dive).
9. *Gules 3 fleur-de-lis argent, a chief nebuly azure
and argent* (Waterville).
10. *Argent, on a cross wavy vert, 5 plates of the first
(Peverel of Brunne).*
11. Frecheville.
*Over all an inescutcheon of pretence sable a fret argent
(Harrington).*

Reynolds is again at fault here in that he tricked a coat of ten quarterings and omitted the arms of Trehampton.

I have tricked the arms individually because the original tinctures, especially in the central pane are now somewhat misleading in that they have faded. This is especially true in the coats containing gules (red); this tincture now appears in various shades from a deep yellow to orange (a rare tincture in heraldry). I say that the tinctures have faded in order to dispel the idea that Henry Gyles had little notion of the rules of heraldry. He must have been commissioned to paint a number of such windows and indeed nine of his heraldic subjects are still extant. Like coach and hatchment painters of the day he must have been versed in the subject to some degree. One has only to look at the arms of Archbishop Lamplugh in one of the south-aisle windows of York Minster choir to see that age has had the same effect on Gyles' heraldic painting as it has had at Staveley.

The explanation of this problem of fading has far greater interest and significance from the point of view of glass-painting.

The manufacture of "ruby", that is glass coloured red throughout the sheet, had been almost lost by Gyles' time though it appears to have been manufactured in a few isolated places on the continent. To produce red in the 17th century, glass painters experimented with a white glass to which was applied a type of yellow enamel stain. This stain was applied to the glass several times producing firstly a rich yellow, then an orange and finally a red. In the Staveley window we can see where this

technique was applied, for the course of time has reversed the process, causing the red enamel to fade and shell off leaving deep yellow or orange in its place.

The window is one of Gyles' largest works and the three square headed lights are obviously an enlargement of one of the smaller windows which exist in the 14th century Chantry Chapel. Dr. Cox commented that "Bassano mentions that it cost £40, a very large price in those days".⁹ Mr. Knowles says that this may well have been so but he has not found any documentary evidence to support this assertion. Dr. Cox further commented that the window "is a fine specimen of the Renaissance style, but looks strangely incongruous within the walls of a gothic church". However, in the Chantry Chapel there are certainly plenty of Renaissance features on the 17th century monuments of the Frechevilles which are reflected in the window — the architectural canopy, the cherubs, the chaplets of roses and the grotesques.

The cherubs themselves may be of interesting origin. In many respects they are similar to those representing the four seasons in the sundial window at Nun Appleton Hall. These were variations based on a study by Titian which Gyles' friends had brought back from Italy¹⁰ and it may well be that his next earliest surviving window at Staveley likewise contained subjects inspired by the great Venetian. Indeed the subject in the top of the central light is often picked out by observers as being quite detached from the rest of the window as though it was incorporated later as an afterthought. Mr. Knowles told me that this is quite probable and that he had seen a sketch of the cherub subject by Gyles somewhere else but he now fails to recollect where. Certain it is that such artists had many sketches and compositions of stereotyped pieces of ornamentation which could readily be incorporated in a larger work. In the window in the Merchant Taylors' Hall in York, for example, a similar group of cherubs hover above the arms of the Company, this time holding a portrait of Queen Anne.

The composition and execution of the window could be

⁹ Cox, I, 358.

¹⁰ *The Walpole Society*, II, 54n.

criticised at length. One of the most recent writers on stained glass, Mr. E. Liddell-Armitage leaves the impression that there is little to admire in the Frecheville window. "As was the prevailing fashion," he says, "the leading shows no relation to the design. If the treatment of the mantling is compared with that of earlier work, it appears a shapeless mass of material with neither feeling for line or pattern. This applies equally to the wings and the drapery. The coronets in perspective give an excellent idea of the artist's attempt at three-dimensional representation, an effect emphasised by the over-burdened cupids struggling with a lump of Renaissance architecture. Before the end of the 17th century practically all the colours, blue, green, ruby, violet, etc., could be produced with enamel paint and thus an artistic poison was available which killed practically every aesthetic faculty the craftsmen of the period might have inherently possessed."¹¹

Though there is much truth in this view, the window still possesses a unique charm and beauty and it is a fine tribute to Gyles' consistent endeavours to obtain materials and commissions in an age when the old art of glass-painting was scarcely in demand.

¹¹ E. Liddell-Armitage, *Stained Glass*, 1959.

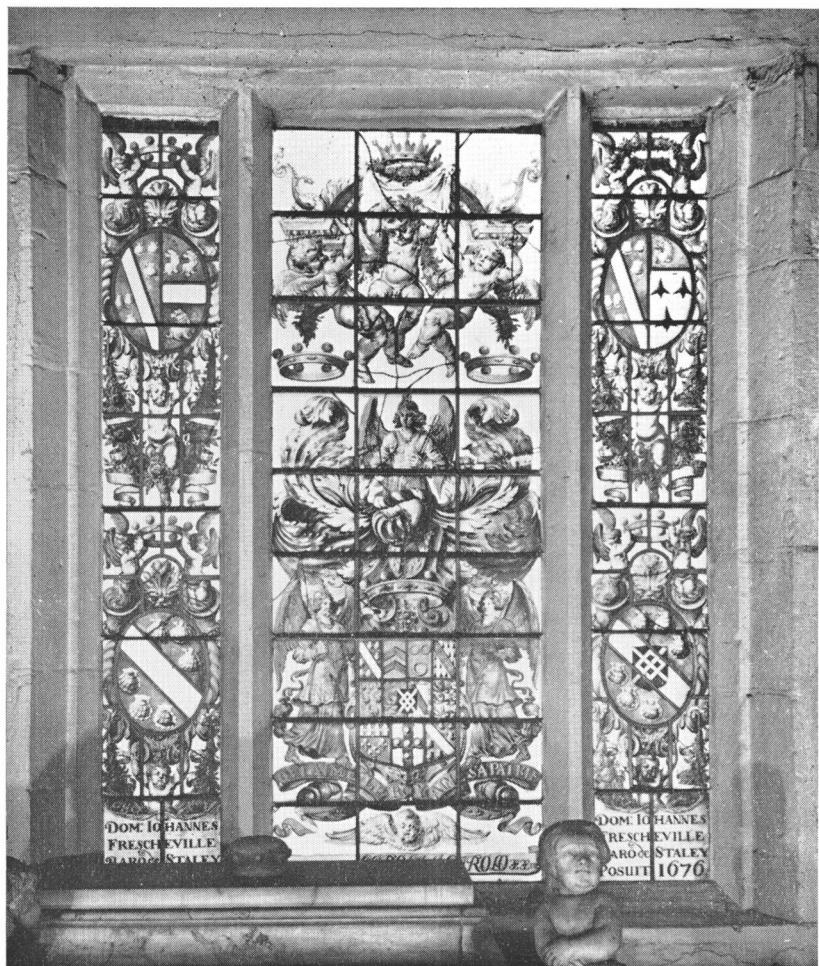


PLATE XI. The Frecheville window in Staveley Church.