

The Medieval Glass in the Churches
of St. John the Baptist, Mileham, and
All Saints and St. Michael-at-Plea,
Norwich.

BY

THE REV. CHRISTOPHER WOODFORDE, M.A., F.S.A.

The medieval glass in these three churches has been chosen for detailed description because it has recently been taken out, cleaned, re-leaded and refixed.¹ Moreover, the glass shows many of the characteristics of Norwich glass-painting of the 14th and 15th centuries and the opportunity has been taken in the following notes to point these out and to offer parallels from glass in other churches of the county.

The greater part of the ancient glass in Mileham church is in the noble three-light west window of the tower. The upper half of the three main lights is filled with the figures of three saints beneath towering

¹ By Messrs. G. King & Son (Lead Glaziers), Ltd., of Norwich, who kindly allowed the writer to examine the glass while it was in their hands and who provided the photographs which illustrate this paper.



MILEHAM.
St. Catherine. 14th century.

canopies. The style of both figures and canopies suggests a date about the middle of the 14th century for the glass. In the southern light is St. Catherine. Her robe and mantle are brown-gold and green. A large patch of blue glass of about the same date has been introduced to fill up a space where the original glass has been lost. Face and crown are painted upon one piece of glass of an unusual size for so early a date and the crown is stained yellow. The saint holds the usual emblems—in her right hand a sword, the point resting on the ground, in her left hand a small wheel. It will be noticed that the usual curved prongs or spikes are shown upon the spokes as well as upon the outer rim of the wheel. In the middle light is St. John Baptist, to whom the church is dedicated. He wears a single full white garment reaching to the knees. In his left hand is a medallion painted with the Agnus Dei and a banner bearing a black cross. He points to the emblem with his right hand. In the northern light is St. Margaret in green and brown-gold garments. Beneath her feet is a white dragon into whose jaws she thrusts a white spear surmounted by a golden cross. In her left hand is a book. The backgrounds of the two female saints are of red glass and that of St. John Baptist green.

One detail of the canopy work needs special notice. The inner faces of the buttresses in the upper parts of the canopies are speckled with black markings. This is evidently an attempt to suggest perspective, and the form of the markings suggests that the glass-painter had Norfolk flint-work in mind. Any effort after perspective and, possibly, naturalism at so early a date is very unusual. Nevertheless, it may be seen again in the main shafts of the canopies over figures of apostles in the southern windows of the chancel at Elsing. This detail, together with the great similarity of drawing and of arrangement of colours, leads us to suppose that the glass in these two churches has a common origin. An examination of the figures of SS. Philip and James in a northern window of the chancel of Saxlingham Nethergate church enables

us to say with a fair degree of certainty that they are also the work of the same man.

The borderwork of the outer lights of the Mileham window consists of oak stems set upon ruby glass. The border of the middle light has white castles and fleurs-de-lys alternating with ruby glass. Borders of castles and fleurs-de-lys or castles and covered cups had, when first introduced, heraldic significance. The fleurs-de-lys were taken from the royal arms, which then incorporated the arms of France: the triple-towered castle of Castile referred to Eleanor of Castile, Queen of King Edward I.: the covered cups recall the arms of the province of Galicia, which was added to Castile and Leon after their union by Ferdinand II. in A.D. 1217. By the time of the painting of the glass now under discussion this significance would probably have been forgotten, and the devices used simply as decoration. At any rate, they were constantly used in border-work of this date all over England. At least a dozen other examples could be quoted from the windows in Norfolk churches alone.

Before dealing with the glass in the lower part of main lights we may notice the tracery lights. The glass in them is of the customary kind. At the top of the window is the nimbed head of Christ. The other lights are filled with foliage, done in yellow glass. Upon the foliage are set coloured and decorated bosses.

The lower parts of the main lights are now filled with a débris of glass collected from other windows of the church. It seems likely that some iconoclast smashed as much of the glass as he could reach from the ground, but did not trouble himself to seek a ladder in order to destroy the saints above. It is not possible to say with certainty how this lower part was originally glazed. There remains a great deal of quarry-work decorated with running sprays of ivy and oak leaves. This quarry-work may belong to the window and have formed the background to heraldic shields or figures of the donors of the glass, or it is just possible that there were one or two scenes from the lives,



MILEHAM.
St. Margaret, 15th century.

martyrdoms or miracles of the saint depicted above; but the most likely supposition is that there were figures of three more saints beneath canopies, and a dedicatory inscription along the bottom of the window.

Below the figure of St. John Baptist is a smaller figure of about the same date. It is of a saint, in brown and green robes, holding a book. The head is lost and has been replaced by a 15th-century male head. The figure is set upon a red background and beneath a graceful little canopy, which unfortunately is not quite complete. Beneath SS. Catherine and Margaret are two 15th-century panels showing SS. Barbara and Margaret. St. Barbara holds in her right hand a palm and in her left a tower. Only one turret of the tower remains. The place of the rest has been taken by an orb from which rises a staff grasped by a hand. It is most probable that this orb was carried by the Deity in a scene of the Coronation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It will be noticed that the orb is divided into three horizontal compartments, showing the sea, land and sky. An orb, similarly divided, forms the base of the cross in a Crucifixion scene at Ringland. The 15th-century head leaved into the 14th-century panel described above may well have been the head of the Deity from this scene. The figure of St. Margaret makes an interesting comparison with the figure above it and shows both the changes and absence of change that took place in portraying the same saint between *c.* 1350 and *c.* 1460-80. There is one most remarkable detail to be observed in the later representation. There can be no doubt that the glass-painter means us to see St. Margaret as pregnant. This shows an extraordinary distortion of the current beliefs about her. There was a legend that while in prison she was swallowed by a dragon. She thereupon made the sign of the cross and "the belly brake asunder, and so she issued out all whole and sound."¹ Occasionally she is shown rising from the dragon, but usually killing the devil with a spear, as

¹ *Golden Legend* (Temple Classics ed.), vol. iv, p. 66.

in our example. The cross surmounting the spear represents the sign of the cross that she made. She became a very popular saint in the Middle Ages because, before her martyrdom, she prayed to God to grant "unto all them that write my passion, read it or hear, and to them that remember me, that they may deserve to have plain remission and forgiveness of all their sins. And also, good Lord, if any woman with child travailling in any place, call on me that thou wilt keep her from peril, and that the child may be delivered from her belly without any hurt of its members."¹ Here is a clear connection with the dragon episode and also a definite indication that the man who painted the Mileham panel had in mind a grossly inaccurate memory of the legend.

These two panels are typical examples of Norwich glass-painting of the second half of the 15th-century. They are done wholly in white glass and yellow stain and are of delicate tone and beautiful draughtsmanship. At Salle is a figure of St. Margaret that follows this one almost line for line. Other typical examples of the work of this particular man or firm are a figure of St. Christopher at Dunston, of various female saints at Kelling, of figures from "Annunciation" scenes at Bale, and the collection of glass in the clerestory windows at Ringland.² Apart from general resemblance two details of decoration join up these and many other examples of Norfolk glass-painting. The robes are decorated with a pattern of little pierced sexfoil roundels stained yellow. We see this pattern repeated again and again. Together with it is a yet more distinctive pattern used to decorate the ground upon which the saints stand. From a distance it resembles a number of golden ears of barley laid in lines at regular intervals. In addition to the places

¹ *Golden Legend* (Temple Classics ed.), vol. iv, p. 71.

² This glass should be studied together with drawings, made by the late George A. King, of panels now lost from Ringland. The drawings are in the possession and the Library of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society.

already quoted the patterns can be found at Cawston, Harpley, Little Walsingham, Great Snoring and, in Norwich, in the Cathedral (roundel showing St. Catherine), the churches of St. Michael-at-Plea, St. Peter Hungate, and All Saints and the windows of the Guildhall. Many other examples might be quoted, but it is perhaps more interesting to notice that these patterns occur again decorating not a few of the wonderful series of portrait effigies of the benefactors of Long Melford Church, Suffolk, and their relations. An East Anglian origin has already been claimed for the greater part of the glass in this church.¹ We may say that a Norwich firm was employed to paint at least those windows in which these particular forms of decoration appear. It might be argued that the pattern upon the dress need not be peculiar to one particular firm and was simple enough to have been used by different painters having no connection with one another. The same argument cannot be used about the "ears of barley" pattern. It is reasonable to suppose that the two together form a sort of unconscious hall-mark of a popular and talented Norwich glass-painter. One other point may be noticed. There is no doubt that the glass in the east windows of St. Peter Mancroft and East Harling churches were painted in Norwich at about the same date as the glass under discussion. Yet the glass in these windows shows practically none of the characteristics that are observable at Mileham and elsewhere.² There were, then, in Norwich at the time

¹ C. Woodforde, Schools of Glass-painting in King's Lynn and Norwich in the Middle Ages, *Journal of the British Society of Master Glass-Painters*, vol. v, pp. 12-13; compare Further Notes on the Ancient Glass in Norfolk and Suffolk, *ib.*, pp. 58-59.

² The glass in the east window of St. Peter Mancroft is a collection of panels from various windows. Different hands may be clearly traced in the different series—for instance, in the panels showing scenes from the Infancy of our Lord and the Life of St. John the Evangelist. A detailed account of them and comparison of them with similar glass elsewhere in East Anglia will be found in the writer's *Medieval Glass in St. Peter Mancroft, Norwich* (Norwich, 1935).

two or probably more firms capable of producing very satisfactory windows of painted and stained glass. Otherwise we must suppose that perhaps two firms had very original artists or very different sets of "copy books" upon which to base their designs. From what we know of other centres of glass-painting—*e.g.* that at York—several small firms, working independently but in harmony, are the most likely solution of these differences.

The lower part of the window contains 15th-century roundels set upon the 14th-century quarry-work that has already been mentioned. There are twelve of these roundels, six of them showing elaborate floral decoration within borders. One is painted with a rose; three others each have one of the letters of the sacred monogram *I.H.S.* within broad and beautiful borders, one has the word *m(er)ci* and another *ladi*. These roundels are not by any means peculiar to Norfolk nor to this century. Glass-painters everywhere found in them a cheap and effective form of decoration, whether they placed them upon quarry backgrounds in the main lights, thereby letting in the maximum amount of light, or put them in the tracery lights in place of figures. Nevertheless, the Norfolk painters seem to have delighted and excelled in the production of these little roundels in the 15th century. Sometimes they painted them with figure subjects as in the case of the lovely little St. Catherine roundel in Norwich Cathedral.¹ There are fragmentary remains of the *Nunc Dimittis* on roundels in Bawburgh church and 16th-century roundels in Thurton church have rhymed proverbs:—1. *Grace, pite and gentylnes.* 2. *preffeth a man to Worthines.* 3. *Be not to pensyve i(n) thy dife(course).* 4. *Brede gode and fle fynne.* 5. *Love treweye and use hit ev(er).* 6. *for he diffeyrith (deserteth) his fuant (servant)*

¹ There are other beautiful examples among George A. King's drawings. Most of them have no note of origin. There can be no doubt that they are of East Anglian origin.

never.¹ It will be noticed that the words *merci* and *ladi* at Mileham are of different sizes and so are not likely to belong directly to each other. Originally they belong to invocations similar to those on roundels at Hoveton St. John—*Ihsu mercy: ladi helpe*. The monograms *I.H.C.*, *I.H.S.* and *M.R.* were often used to decorate the roundels. The best examples are at Saxlingham Nethergate and Horsford. By far the most extensive series of these roundels were once to be seen at Ringland, but most of them can now only be studied in George A. King's water-colour copies.

At the bottom of the window are remains of a series of the symbols of the four Evangelists. At some time they were cut up to make borders to the lights. They have now been reassembled as far as possible. They are set upon 19th-century quarry-work. The remaining pieces of border-work are chiefly 15th-century glass, some of them being fragments of winged angels from tracery lights.

In the south-east window of the chancel is an interesting little scene. To the right kneel a man and woman in blue garments. In front of them are two horses. The horse nearest the figures is complete and has panniers slung over its back. At the beginning of the 19th century the words *Thomas broun* were to

¹ In the south-west window of the chancel of Melton Constable church are panels which combine picture and moral precept. One shows a woman in a garden. She holds a flower and behind her are two attendants. To the right are trees with their leaves falling. In the foreground are the walls and towers of a castle. On the woman's dress is the word *fufan* (Susan). On another panel is this:

Synne and iniquite
Brynge them to myfere
Thys ys nott to leer

These two panels seem to be but remnants of a series illustrating the *History of Susanna*. There would have been panels illustrating the two elders gazing upon Susanna in the garden and, probably, falsely accusing her. The verse would have paired off with the execution of the elders for false witness. No doubt each scene had its accompanying verse. The glass is English, showing foreign influence, and of early 16th-century date.

be seen below the figures and *Peddar*, evidently for *Pedlar*, above. Now only the word *broun* remains. Above was noted "the Virgin teaching the child Jesus to read,"¹ which was no doubt "St. Anne instructing the Blessed Virgin Mary." It is possible that Anne was the name of Thomas Brown's wife. The panel is set upon a background of painted quarries. Two different patterns are used and both are typical and favourite designs of the Norwich school of glass-painting. Examples either identical with or varying slightly from them are to be found in churches all over Norfolk and Suffolk.

In the larger tracery lights of the east window of the chancel are three figures set upon backgrounds of 15th-century canopy-work. One shows a 14th-century figure of a youthful male saint, in brown and green robes, holding a book. It seems probable that it represents St. John the Evangelist and that the figure below that of St. John Baptist in the west window is another of the apostles from the same series. The second panel of the same date shows a bishop, in brown alb and green cope, with a yellow crosier. To the next century belongs a larger figure of a female saint in blue and white robes. Below her is *Sca Agatha*.

The church of All Saints, Norwich has late 15th-century glass in windows of the north aisle. The second window from the east has glass in the tracery lights as follows:—1. A figure of St. Jude with a boat. Below is *Iudas* upon a scroll, but the name does not belong to the figure above it. Fragments of a pallium and a crosier with vexillum; these fragments belong to a large figure of an archbishop, perhaps St. Thomas Becket. *Scs Rich* . . . upon a scroll. This must be for St. Richard of Chichester, whose fine late 13th-century figure may be seen painted on the vaulting of the Relic Chamber in the north choir aisle of Norwich Cathedral. 2. St. Simon with a fish.

¹ Blomefield, *History of Norfolk* (ed. 1805), vol. x, p. 23.



MILEHAM.

Thomas Brown, Pedlar, and his wife. 15th century.



ALL SAINTS, NORWICH.

Apostles and St. Mary Cleophas. Late 15th century.

Agatha on a scroll. Figure of St. Jude with a boat. On a scroll (*Sca*) *Brigid(a)* for St. Bridget of Sweden; the more usual form of the name was *Birgitta*. In a tracery light of a window of Sandringham Church is another figure of this saint. She is represented as a nun writing in a book held open in her right hand. On her right shoulder perches a nimbed dove to represent the Holy Spirit inspiring her. She is named upon a scroll across her figure and the glass-painter was evidently uncertain as to the spelling of her name. He seems first to have spelt it *Bridiga* and then to have altered the *d* so that it can read either *d* or *g* and to have erased the tail of the second *g* so as to make the name read *Brigina*. There can be little doubt that the saints in the tracery lights at Sandringham came from the same hand as those in All Saints' Church.¹

3. St. James the Less with a club, named *Iacob*, and an unnamed apostle with a book. Fragments of robes.

4. Figures of *Maria cleoph(a)* and of an apostle with *us* upon a piece of a scroll. 5. *S̄s Paulus* on a scroll occupies its original position in the upper cusp of the light. It will be noticed that the lettering is of the same type as the *S̄s Rich* . . . fragment. Below are a fish, the emblem of St. Simon, and remains of figures of female saints and a piece of blue robe. 6. Parts of a figure of St. Cecilia, holding a wreath and a book, and of a figure holding a palm. Other fragments include a beautifully painted female head with late 15th-century headdress and pieces of the large figure of the above mentioned archbishop. Two pieces of lettering read *S̄s* and *carnis resur(rectionem)*, the portion of the Apostles' Creed allotted to St. Jude. An interesting fragment is a piece of ruby glass cleverly abraded to show a white rose upon it. In the head of the window is an *I.H.S.* monogram and, in the three main lights, tops of canopies.

¹ The saints at Sandringham are Leonard, Vincent, Margaret, Bridget, Ignatius, Michael, Erasmus, Agnes, Stephen, Francis of Assisi (name only, now attached to the figure of a female saint), Giles, Apollonia, Dorothy, Etheldreda, and Catherine.

In the head of the next window is a small standing figure of the "Christ of Pity": a blue mantle is thrown back and the arms are out-stretched. In the main lights are a few fragments including pieces of a fine blue robe. In the head of the next window are yellow rays and a quarry with a pattern similar to that decorating at Mileham. Two other lights also contain patterned quarries.

The painted glass in the east window of the church of St. Michael-at-Plea is in a very fragmentary condition, but includes some interesting pieces of glass. In the quatrefoil light at the head of the window are pieces of two square panels painted with crowned *M* monograms. There is also a hand holding a scallop shell, being all that is left of a figure of St. James Major. There are remains of verses done in lettering remarkable for its clarity and beauty. The larger reads:

... ly cuppys off golde
 ... r.bey(n)g ky(n)ge of yⁱ reine:
 ... r. Wher daniel hy' tolde.

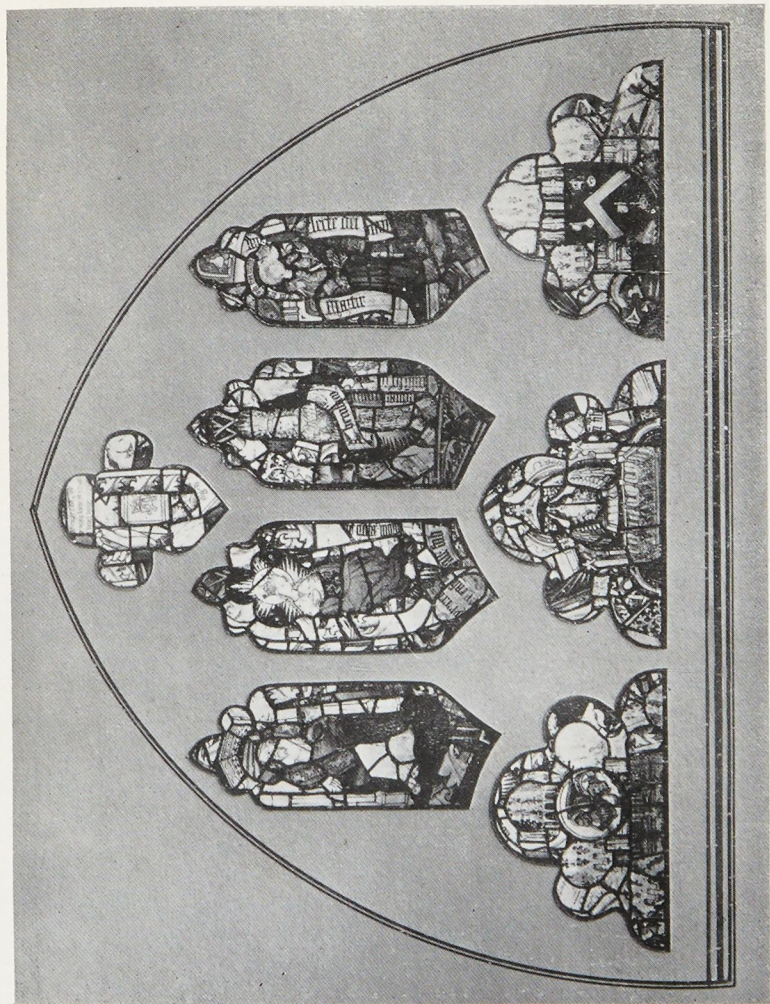
and the other

... loth Wa
 ... S hys.y.d
 ... a mounte a W

The first verse may be based upon *Daniel* v, 1, 2, "Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem." Windows with scenes from the life of Daniel were of fairly frequent occurrence.

The four tracery lights below contain glass as follows:—

i. Portion of a figure of Christ crucified, probably from a representation of the Holy Trinity: pieces of robes, borderwork, canopies and bases.



ST. MICHAEL-AT-PLEA, NORWICH.
Fifteenth-century glass in the East Window.

ii. A beautiful little figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary, seated with arms crossed upon the breast. The figure is set against a rayed background and comes from a scene of the Annunciation or, more probably, her Coronation. Pieces of lettering, including *Pass(us) sub (Pontio Pil)ato, crucifixu(s), mortu(us et sepultus)*, which is that portion of the Apostles' Creed assigned to St. John the Evangelist. Another fragment belonging to the above-mentioned verses seems to read:

.... *ytygei*
 *r. measi*

iii. The main part of the light is taken up with a figure of a feathered angel wearing an ermine tippet and "rolled" linen collar. Upon the breast is a large star and upon the head a large and ornate coronet. A scroll running across the breast bears the word *Cherubyn*. This figure is from a series of the Nine Orders of Angels. They are often to be seen in 15th-century glass in Norfolk, as at Banningham, Great Snoring, Mulbarton, Narborough, Salle and Wiggenhall St. Mary Magdalene. Other fragments in the light include an initial *W* very like one inserted into the top left-hand corner of the panel showing "St. Peter walking on the water" in the east window of St. Peter Mancroft¹ and still more like one on a quarry bearing the initials *W.P.*, drawn by George A. King and noted by him as being once in Devereux House, in St. George's Parish. Another fragment shows a man leaning over a parapet. A third scrap of glass is particularly interesting. It is painted with flowers growing upon a mound, the precipitous sides of which are drawn in a series of concave curves and decorated with horizontal lines, giving the appearance of hurdles. This peculiar way of representing scenery is to be found constantly in the panels showing scenes from the Infancy and Passion of our Lord and the Death and Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in

¹ *Medieval Glass of St. Peter Mancroft*, pl. facing p. 9.

the east window of St. Peter Mancroft.¹ It seems more than likely that the Norwich firm which painted these panels painted glass for St. Michael-at-Plea. The only alternative is that some later glazier patched the St. Michael-at-Plea window with bits of ancient glass left over from some "restoration" at St. Peter Mancroft. The work of this particular firm of glass-painters is, as has been said, scarcely represented elsewhere in Norfolk.

iv. Here is the upper part of the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary kneeling at a desk with the Holy Dove approaching in a glory. Above is a scroll bearing the words *Ecce anc(illa) d(omi)ni fiat michi*. It will be noticed that her robe is patterned with the pierced sexfoil pattern, which is surmised to be a mark of Norwich workmanship. Above the figure is a piece of glass showing an ewer set in front of a glazed window. Pieces of lettering read *.electe dei* and *Martir*. The lower part of a figure of a female saint and remains of angels playing upon lutes may also be noticed.

The heads of the three main lights are also filled with fragments:—

i. Upon many pieces of canopy-work is set a roundel painted with a winged and nimbed lion bearing in its mouth a scroll bearing the word *Marcus*. This is one of a series of the emblems of the four Evangelists.

ii. Part of a small scene of an entombment. Also a very ornate shrine with arcaded sides and with jewelled cover in the shape of a roof. This must have come from a window with panels showing scenes of healing at the shrine of some saint. There are the wings, head and feet of an angel. A piece of lettering reads: (*Et in Ihesu)m Christ(u)m fili(um eius unicum dominum nostrum*), the portion of the Apostles' Creed assigned to St. Andrew.

iii. Upon canopy-work is set a shield of arms bearing *Gu.*, a chevron between three keys arg., for

¹ *Medieval Glass of St. Peter Mancroft*, pl. facing p. 24.

Parker. A small fragment of glass shows part of a figure of a man bearing a bundle of sticks upon his back. This could represent Isaac carrying the wood for the sacrifice, which scene was used as an Old Testament "type" or foreshadowing of Christ carrying the cross, or it could be part of a scene showing the martyrdom of some such saint as St. Laurence. In scenes of martyrdom by fire it was not unusual to introduce subsidiary figures engaged in carrying faggots or increasing the heat of the fire with bellows.

All this glass, except the shield of arms, is to be dated *c.* 1460—1480 and is of typical Norwich workmanship. The shield of arms appears to belong to the following century.¹

In the middle of each main light is set a shield of arms. Two are of ancient glass and show the arms of the See of Norwich and of England quartering France. The third is modern and shows the arms of the See of Ely.

¹ These are said to have been assigned to Parker of Lambeth in 1572. Farrer, *Church Heraldry of Norfolk*, vol. iii, p. 93, quoting Papworth.