

Introduction¹

Survival

Stained glass is one of the most attractive of media, its special quality being that light passes through it, giving it an immediacy denied to other kinds of artistic production. It also keeps out the weather, illuminates the interior to the desired level and provides imagery and decoration. However, wind and rain and pollution damage the glass and its setting, leading to its loss where adequate conservation is not provided; changes in architectural fashion, sometimes involved the degree of light required, resulting in new windows, the original glazing being often discarded; in sacred spaces changes in what was considered appropriate imagery have resulted in similar replacements, and, at times of religious upheaval, in the deliberate destruction of much medieval stained glass. Thus, in what follows one must always bear in mind that only a tiny proportion of the medieval glass made for Norfolk buildings has survived.

In England, almost all of the earliest coloured glass glazing from late-Roman times onwards has been lost, known only from archaeological excavations, such as those at Anglo-Saxon Jarrow and Wearmouth. Survivals of stained glass before the twelfth century are rare, and most of those from the twelfth and thirteenth

centuries are in cathedral or monastic contexts, such as Canterbury Cathedral and York Minster, although it is difficult in this country to assess how far parish churches were glazed at that time. In Norfolk, the chancel of one church, probably Caistor St Edmund, was glazed with medallions and possibly grisaille glass c. 1250 (see below) and a few other churches in the county have fragments of glass of that period, nearly all decorative grisaille, for example at Drayton,



Figure 2: Carleton Rode, chancel window, King David, c. 1290-c. 1300.

1. This introduction and a few of the location texts include the results of unpublished research that will appear in the Norfolk Summary Catalogue of the Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi. This will be fully referenced and references here are kept to a minimum.

with churches such as Carleton Rode (fig. 2), **Downham Market** (fig. 52) and **Dunston** (fig. 56), having some figurative glass towards the end of the century.

In the succeeding centuries, stained glass was made in great profusion and in many European countries, but its survival still depended on chance and the amount of rebuilding and replacement or deliberate destruction of windows. France retains the most medieval glass, but Germany has many important sites, with several in Switzerland, Austria and Spain. In the Netherlands, much was destroyed or over-restored, but thousands of Flemish roundels made for the domestic market survive, mostly in other countries, such as the USA, which has much imported glass. In England, apart from panels now in museums, the surviving

medieval glass is found in large quantities in only a few churches, such as Canterbury Cathedral, York Minster, King's College Chapel, Cambridge, and Fairford parish church in Gloucestershire, but, in lesser amounts and in varying condition, in many more buildings, both sacred and secular, including some large museum collections.² The reformation of the church in Great Britain from a Roman Catholic to a Protestant institution in the sixteenth century led to the destruction of a huge amount of stained glass, particularly in monasteries, and much more was lost during the Puritanical reign of Oliver Cromwell, with a further diminishing caused by neglect in the eighteenth century, followed by the over-zealous provision of new windows at the expense of old in the nineteenth century.

Medieval and early-modern stained glass in Norfolk

This book is intended to provide an introduction to medieval and some later stained glass in Norfolk. The county, as far as is known in the present state of research, has the largest number of locations with medieval and early-modern glass of any county in England, and also has a rich archive of information on what has been lost. It was very prosperous in the late Middle Ages, largely because of its production of wool, and most churches were partly or wholly rebuilt and glazed in the fourteenth, fifteenth or early-sixteenth century. Although the great bulk of the glass has been lost, the sheer number of churches in the county (over six hundred survive in whole or in part) means that, overall, a large amount of glass has survived, compared with many counties, but with a few exceptions in small individual quantities.

In addition to these many collections of local glass, Norfolk has benefited from the fact that the early-nineteenth-century revival in interest in medieval (and Renaissance) glass caused by large-scale importations from the continent was centred on Norwich (of which more later), with the result that, although this imported glass is now widely distributed across the country and abroad, much stayed in the county, which has 64 buildings containing sometimes large amounts of foreign stained glass.

In all, about 275 buildings, predominantly churches, have some ancient glass, although it has often been removed from its original setting, and is sometimes now in a different building. Almost 60 of the most important collections are described and illustrated below in order to give a representative taste of what is a truly remarkable heritage.

2. Since the 1950s, the publications of the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi* have greatly increased knowledge of medieval stained glass in Europe and the USA. See www.corpusvitrearum.org.

Looking at windows – context

When looking at stained glass in a church, an appreciation of context is important – how does (or did) the window relate to the rest of the church? This is often made difficult where the glass is incomplete or no longer in its original location. Knowing the original position of a window and its place in the liturgical and burial disposition of the church is helpful, as windows were often associated with altars, whose dedications were reflected in the glass, or with tombs, where the glass added to the commemoration of those buried in them. Some windows related to guilds

or fraternities that met in a particular chapel. The imagery in the glass was often linked to that in wall paintings, sculptures, altarpieces and painted cloth hangings. For example, one gap in the subject matter of the original windows at **Salle** church (figs. 170-74) appears to have been the Life of Christ, and this was filled by the series of wood carvings on the roof of the chancel. Conversely, in some Norfolk churches there was some repetition in subject matter between windows and screens, many of which survive.

How stained glass changed

The appearance of windows naturally changed over time, partly because of the changes in design in the stonework of the windows in which they were placed, starting with single or compound lancets with no tracery, then simple geometric tracery forms, followed by the much more decorative and elaborate openings of the Decorated style, gradually replaced by the more linear and rigorous tracery patterns of the Perpendicular style. The use of colour also varied, the primary colours dominating thirteenth-century windows, unless they were grisaille windows made predominantly of painted white glass. A useful development in the early fourteenth century was the application of a yellow stain to enable coloured details to be added to a piece of white (and occasionally coloured) glass. To the primary colour spectrum was added more often, particularly after 1350, a range of intermediate colours such as purple, murrey and various shades of green. In the fifteenth century, a full range of colours was available, but there was often, particularly in parish churches, a return to a simpler palette, with the accent on red, blue and

white, plus yellow stain, with smaller amounts of the other colours. Coloured glass was expensive, so that sometimes figures were painted solely on white glass, although this may have been also an aesthetic choice. In the sixteenth century there was a return to richly coloured windows, such as in King's College, Cambridge, and in the remains of the east chancel window glazing at the churches of **Norwich St Andrew** (figs. 136-38) and **Norwich St Stephen** (figs. 150-51), although in more humble buildings a more modest choice was made.

Another aspect that changed over time was style. This involved different parts of the window, including figures (divided into head and drapery), canopy design and decorative elements such as backgrounds, borders and non-figurative roundels. Glass-painting was a shared activity, with different procedures and parts of a window being carried out by different workers. Analysis of the different styles seen in Norfolk glass has enabled many panels and windows to be ascribed to particular workshops, nearly all in Norwich, and in some cases to a named painter.

Problems of restoration

Looking at medieval stained glass requires some effort, particularly in this country, where so much of the extant glass has been damaged or moved. Over the centuries, but mainly in the nineteenth and twentieth, much of the glass has been restored, which may have ensured its survival, but the methods used have also sometimes made it more difficult to understand. Some skilful painters have restored the glass by repainting sections in such a way that to the untrained eye it is difficult to know what is old and what is new. A good example of this is at **Poringland** (figs. 162-63), where the restorer

has wisely added the date to the new pieces. In this book, the illustrations have been chosen to avoid restored glass as far as possible. A common procedure in modern times has been to gather together what remains in the windows of a church into one window. The resulting arrangements vary from the aesthetically attractive to the grotesque, but any movement of glass can lead to a loss of contextual information. When foreign glass was acquired, the panels were often installed surrounded by a nineteenth-century setting, which sometimes included medieval local glass.

Antiquarian sources

One very useful resource to help in the understanding of a window that is no longer complete or that is lost is antiquarian descriptions and illustrations of glass. Norfolk is blessed with a large amount of such material, not only in published form – most importantly, the eleven-volume second edition of Blomefield and Parkin's *History of Norfolk*³ – but also as manuscript and pictorial

material in various archives and libraries, mainly the Norfolk Record Office, Norwich Castle Museum, the British Library in London and the Bodleian Library in Oxford. The earliest of the manuscripts date from around 1575. The scope of this book does not often permit a mention of this material in the descriptions, but many of the conclusions are based on it.

Financing and making the windows – donors

Most of the medieval glass in Norfolk was made for churches. In a few cases, such as at **Elsing** (figs. 68-70), the whole church was built and decorated by a single donor or group of donors, who may or may not have been the patron. More often, different donors provided glass for different parts of the church. The chancel was usually built and glazed by the rector, who was legally responsible, but others helped financially, especially if the advowson was in the hands of an ecclesiastical body. At **Salle**, a lost inscription in the chancel

glazing recorded that the rector, William Wode, built and finished the chancel in 1440. This would have included the stained glass, enough of which is left to give a hint of its former magnificence (figs. 172-74). In many other churches there is evidence of a single chancel window given by the rector or patron, often including imagery marking the dedication of the church. A late-thirteenth-century figure of St Remigius in the north-east chancel window of the church of **Dunston**, dedicated to that saint, is accompanied by a kneeling figure of

3. F. Blomefield and C. Parkin, *An Essay Towards a Topographical History of the County of Norfolk*, 2nd edition, 11 vols (Norwich, 1805-10) (1st edition, 5 vols, 1739-75).

the prioress of Flixton, the patron (fig. 56). In the fourteenth century, figures of rectors themselves are recorded in chancel windows, or an inscription mentioning the rector or his shield of arms was present. Sometimes a lay patron gave a chancel window – such was the case at **Chedgrave**, where Sir James Hobart's name occurred in the east window in 1521 (fig. 43) – or a lay donor who was not the patron gave a window, as was the case at Cringleford in the fourteenth century with Sir Adam de Berford, whose figure was in the east chancel window.

Other parts of the church had a variety of donors. At **Norwich St Peter Mancroft** (figs. 6, 147-50), the north chancel chapel had three windows, with the celebrated Toppes Window in the east.⁴ All three were given by a mayor of Norwich, or made to commemorate one. On the south side, one window was paid for by a suffragan bishop and probably painted by a female glazier.⁵ At **East Harling** (figs. 1, 5, 7, 64-67), the east

windows of the chancel and Lady Chapel and a window in St Anne's Chapel were given by the patron, Anne Harling.⁶ At **Great Cressingham** (figs. 80-82), the east window and probably all the windows of the north aisle were provided by Judge William Paston. In the absence of a wealthy donor, sometimes the members of a guild joined together to provide a window, as was the case, for example, at **Hingham** and **Ringland** in the fourteenth century and at **Ringland** also in the fifteenth (figs. 166-69).⁷

An overall picture of medieval stained glass donors in Norfolk reveals that in the fourteenth century, local landowners, including many members of the aristocracy, were predominant, but after that, donors came from a wider social background, including merchants (particularly in Norwich) and more humble parishioners. Throughout the period, the clergy were also frequent providers of windows, but in some cases with financial help from other sources

Choice of subject

Those paying for a window sometimes were able to choose its subject, provided it was approved by the church. Choosing a saint who shared the donor's name was common, as at **Salle** c. 1444, where in the south transept Thomas Brigg is seen kneeling next to St Thomas of Canterbury, and St Margaret appears with Thomas' two wives, who both had that name.⁸ Next to Thomas' window was one depicting the Life of St John the Baptist, which was dedicated to the memory of a rector called John. Where saints were chosen by the donor, this could mean that the window was not part of a

series with a common theme. However, there are cases in Norfolk, as elsewhere, of several windows depicting a linked series of subjects. The chancel at **Salle** was such a case, where the six side windows had a series of kings, bishops and popes based on a similar series in York Minster, with Old Testament figures and cardinals in the tracery. The south aisle side windows at **Salle** appear to have had an Old Testament cycle, but each window may have been paid for by a separate donor. The most extensive series of windows with a common figurative theme may have been at **Wiggenhall St Mary**

4. D.J. King, *The Medieval Stained Glass of St Peter Mancroft, Norwich*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, Great Britain, vol. 5 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2006), pp. clxix-ccxiv.

5. King, *Medieval Stained Glass of St Peter Mancroft*, pp. cxlv, n. 294, ccxxv-ccxxx.

6. D. King, *The Medieval Stained Glass of Norfolk*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, Great Britain, Digital Publications, <https://www.cvma.ac.uk/publications/digital/norfolk/index.html> (accessed 17 February 2023), East Harling.

7. King, *Medieval Stained Glass of Norfolk*, Ringland.

8. King, *Medieval Stained Glass of Norfolk*, Salle.



Figure 3 (above): North Tuddenham, porch window, angels singing, c. 1430-c. 1450.



Figure 4 (right): Wicklewood, nave window, Coronation of the Virgin (part), c. 1410-c.1415.

Magdalene(figs. 218-20), where the six windows of the north aisle still retain in their traceries most of a set of 60 figures of angels and male saints taken from the Sarum Litanies, and there is some evidence that the south aisle may have had a similar series of female saints. Whether the main-light glass shared a common programme is not known. The windows were made by at least three different workshops in the first half of the fifteenth century and it is probable that various local dignitaries were the donors. The liturgical derivation was almost

certainly devised by the patron of the church, the Cluniac Priory of Castle Acre.⁹

Thus, when we speak of the donor of the window, this may conceal a more complex situation. One person may have paid for the window, chosen the glazier and also the subject of the window, but, in many cases, others may have contributed towards the cost, the incumbent or patron may have had the final say on the subject matter and the glazier may have been left to work out the details of the design.

9. C. Keyser, 'Notes on some Fifteenth-Century Glass in the Church of Wiggshall St Mary Magdalene', *Norfolk Archaeology*, vol. 16 (1907), pp. 306-19; D.J. King, 'The Stained Glass of Wiggshall St Mary Magdalene, Norfolk', in J. McNeill (ed.), *King's Lynn and the Fens: Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions, vol. 31 (Leeds: Maney, 2008), pp. 186-98; D. King, *The Medieval Stained Glass of Norfolk*, Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi, Great Britain, Digital Publications, <https://www.cvma.ac.uk/publications/digital/norfolk/index.html> (accessed 17 February 2023).

Why were stained glass windows made?

The motivation behind the provision of stained glass for churches was often complex. One aspect was the desire of donors for others to pray for their soul, and many windows had inscriptions asking people to do this. Another was the church's need to ensure that all parishioners had a basic knowledge of Christian tenets, and several types of windows were provided as a means of ensuring this. Apostles bearing Creed scrolls could be used by priests as visual aids in teaching the tenets listed in the Creed. Although few people were fully competent in Latin, attendance at mass would have meant that many would have some familiarity with the language, and the priest in his homily would probably have provided a vernacular explanation. Other aspects of Christian belief were conveyed by visual imagery, such as the Corporal Works of Mercy and the Seven Sacraments. An important type of imagery was the depiction of saints, including single figures, series of saints of different kinds, for example, female saints or royal saints, and narrative lives of saints. These brought a sense of familiarity to parishioners, who may have found it easier to cultivate a personal devotion to a particular saint, often their name saint, than to a more abstract heavenly being such as the Holy Trinity. Many saints were believed to be a source of help for particular needs, for example, St Margaret in childbirth. Nevertheless, the cult of the Blessed Virgin Mary remained the most popular devotion in the late Middle Ages, as she was felt by many to be the most effective source of intercession with Christ. For women, she was a role model as a mother.

One reason for providing stained glass that is sometimes not given enough attention was the simple desire to praise God, a desire promoted

by the church, but increasingly spontaneously felt by parishioners as the result of the growth of lay piety. The iconography of praise is everywhere to be seen in Norfolk churches, predominantly in the form of angels in glass, wood and stone carving. Many of the angels are playing musical instruments and others sing, bearing sometimes the liturgical texts that they sing (and occasionally elsewhere the musical notation), for example, at **East Barsham** (figs. 61-63) and **Great Cressingham** (figs. 80-81).

The many displays of local heraldry, sometimes combined with that of the nobility, on the other hand, speak of the desire of armigerous donors to assert their family connections, and their connections with those above them in the social hierarchy. Church windows, being seen by all parishioners, were a very effective means of achieving this. Another rather different reason for the provision of a window was to promote a political point of view, going beyond heraldic display and using often very sophisticated means. A number of such cases have been found in Norfolk glass at **Norwich St Peter Mancroft** (fig. 149), **East Harling, Salle** and Wiggenshall St Peter (in glass now at **North Tuddenham**, figs. 125-26), all from the fifteenth century, either in favour of the Yorkist or Lancastrian regime, or, in the last case, commenting on local politics in King's Lynn.¹⁰ The example at **East Harling** is explained below. This aspect may seem to the modern mind to have been inappropriate, but to the medieval mind allegiance to royalty was closely linked to religious adherence, as the king was often identified as God's earthly representative, and in the case of King's Lynn, the politics also concerned both the king and the bishop of Norwich.

10. D. King, 'Reading the Material Culture: Stained Glass and Politics in Late Medieval Norfolk', in L. Clark (ed.), *Rule, Redemption and Representations in Late Medieval England and France*, The Fifteenth Century, vol. 8 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 105-34; D. King, 'A Scene from the Life of St Margaret of Antioch', *Vidimus*, no. 60 (May 2012), <https://www.vidimus.org/issues/issue-60/feature> (accessed 21 December 2022).

Glaziers and workshops

The question of where the windows in Norfolk were made and by whom can be answered to a greater extent than in most areas of the country, thanks largely to two circumstances: firstly, as Norwich was one of the largest cities in England in the late Middle Ages, it was able to support a number of large and long-lasting glaziers' workshops, each having recognisable stylistic characteristics; and secondly, the county and especially its capital retain an extensive archive, allowing workshops to be constructed from the documentary information it contains.¹¹

The earliest possible reference to a glazier in Norfolk was in 1140, when Daniel *vitarius* (glazier) was made abbot of the monastery of St Benet at Holm. He had been a married man and would have exercised his craft well before becoming abbot. The earliest extant stained glass in Norfolk of note is now in **Saxlingham Nethergate** church (fig. 180), consisting of four medallions and some grisaille glass of c. 1250. It has recently been discovered that this glass almost certainly came from Caistor St Edmund church, where the chancel has four side windows of this date and of a size to accommodate this glass. The advowson of the church was owned by the Abbey of Bury St Edmund (some of the medallions depict St Edmund), although the windows were probably made in Norwich. A few other remains of grisaille glass of the same date are in other parish churches or have been found in excavations, but rather more monastic sites have produced examples when excavated.

There is a single reference to a glazier in Norwich in 1241, but continuous glazing activity in the city is documented from 1280, when a glazier and his son were paid for work at **Norwich Cathedral**. The glaziers in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries lived mainly in the area around Tombland outside the

gates to the cathedral and some are documented as working for the cathedral, which had been badly damaged in a riot in 1278.

From about 1350 onwards, glaziers were acquiring properties further south on Conesford (modern King Street). The mid-fourteenth-century Conesford glaziers almost certainly painted glass for the Franciscan friary there (some of them lived opposite) and possibly for the Augustinian friary further down the street. Some of the Franciscan friary glass has survived because the building and its contents were acquired at the Reformation by Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk. The Howards had a house in Surrey Street in Norwich, where in the nineteenth century William Stevenson lived, who traded in glass. In 1805 an antiquarian visited him and bought a panel of glass from the friary depicting the Crucifixion, which must have survived in the house since the sixteenth century. Some of the King Street glaziers of this period were impressed in 1351 to work on the glazing of St Stephen's Chapel, Westminster, and one worked on the glass made at Westminster for Windsor Castle in 1352/3.

A later glazier who worked for the cathedral and had a workshop in Tombland previously owned by Gilbert Sadler was Robert Markaunt, made a freeman in 1379/80. He was paid by the cathedral almoner in 1412 for glazing in the chancel at Wicklewood. Starting with some extant glass there of about that date (fig. 3), glass in a number of other churches can be attributed to his workshop on the basis of style, including **Besthorpe** (figs. 26-27), **Saxlingham Nethergate** (fig. 179), South Burlingham and **Kimberley** (fig. 106).

The production of stained glass in Norwich was dominated for much of the century by two workshops, called the John Wighton and the William Heyward Workshops, after their

11. For the Norwich glaziers, see D. King, 'Medieval Glaziers' Workshops in Norwich', in E.C. Pastan and B. Kurmann-Schwarz (eds.), *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), pp. 362-73.



Figure 5: East Harling, fragments from east chancel Te Deum window, 1491-1498.