

THE NETHERLANDISH WINDOW GLASS IN THE CHURCH OF ST JOHN THE EVANGELIST, ROWNHAMS, HAMPSHIRE

by WILLIAM COLE

There appears to be very little information about the Netherlandish glass in the church of St John the Evangelist, Rownhams. The only certain fact is that it was inserted by 'Mr Ward of London'. We know this from a loquacious reporter of the *Hampshire Advertiser* (27 October 1855) who wrote a description of the church and its dedication which took place on 23 October 1855. Of the other local newspapers, the *Hampshire Independent* does not mention the dedication and the *Hampshire County Paper* (27 October 1855) has only a few lines. One would normally expect an article on the new church in *The Builder* or *The Ecclesiologist*, but there is nothing. The Rev R F Wilson, who was vicar from 1863 to 1889 published *Short notes of seven years' work in a country parish* in 1872 but it contains very little about the church and nothing about the glass.

The *Victoria County History* (Hants 3 663) has only two facts about the church and both are incorrect. Its patron saint is named as St John the Baptist and the date of the building is a year late, 1856, as in Wilson (1872, 2).

The *Hampshire Advertiser* reported that the owner of Rownhams Hall, Major William Colt, bequeathed a large sum for the rebuilding of the church on a site opposite one of his lodge gates. He also provided the parsonage, the schools and the school house. He died before the work was completed but it was finished by his widow who also gave £2,000 for an endowment. The architect was an amateur, the Rev William Grey who was also the architect of St Michael, Swanmore, Ryde. The reporter included the names of those who were connected with the building of the church, we know therefore that Mr Ward of London inserted the

glass. It is described as follows: 'The side windows are all stained glass, containing an immensity of old medallions, consisting of designs from scripture history in the medieval style, worked up in modern glass, rich in colouring, by Mr Ward of London. The east and west windows are plain at present.' At the dedication a collection was taken for glass for the west window which amounted to £36. The west window was eventually glazed with the life of St John the Evangelist. It suffered from blast damage during the Second World War, but miraculously the actual figure of the saint was not damaged and is now the only piece of stained glass in the west window. Mr Ward of London was Thomas Ward (1808-1870), an important glass painter. In the mid 19th century the firm of Ward and Hughues was 'the oldest established firm of glass painters in London and did a great quantity of work.' (Anon 1962, 520). Charles Winston, a barrister and stained glass amateur, who had encouraged the revival of the medieval tradition, thought highly of Thomas Ward as he entrusted him with many of his designs. Unfortunately there is no mention of Rownhams glass in Winston's papers and letters (Add Mss 33846-33851, Dept of Manuscripts, British Library). The firm of Ward and Hughues finally disbanded in 1924 and there are no available records of their work.

It is possible that Thomas Ward obtained the Netherlandish glass on the orders of Major Colt as Ward had access to old glass. He presented a collection of ancient glass to the church at Normanton, Yorkshire, where his parents were buried (Anon 1962, 520). Netherlandish glass was not difficult to purchase in



Fig 1. Rownhams: no 1, St Mary Magdalene, Netherlandish, Leuven, c 1525 or a later copy.



Fig 2. Rownhams: no 7, St Martha, Netherlandish, Flemish, c 1540.

the 19th century. It could be bought at the main London auction houses as well as direct from the continent. Details of the import of old stained glass into England can be found in Rackham 1927, 86-94 and Lafond 1964, 58-67. The writer has made a study of Netherlandish glass in several churches in England but, in spite of much research, in no case has it been possible to discover how or when the glass arrived here. For example, at St George's Chapel, Windsor, where records are very detailed, there is no mention of the acquiring of the roundels which were inserted in the chantry chapel of Edward IV in 1782 (Cole 1976). As most panels would have originally come from monasteries or convents in Belgium or Holland there might have been a certain reluctance to be specific, almost as if it were something that should not have been done.

At Rownhams there are 46 panels of Netherlandish glass (see catalogue, microfiche frames 18-34, for details, and Figs 1-11). There is a Victorian one among the Netherlandish in the south transept window (no 16). When the church was extended one bay to the west in 1885 and another window added on the north wall, six contemporary panels were placed in it (nos 47-52). There have been some alterations since the glass was first inserted in 1855. We know this because a former vicar, the Rev A Simons, found some notes on the glass in a safe in the vestry which he published in twelve instalments in the parish magazines for 1924. They state the subject of each panel and the legends about some of the saints but give little else. Some of the subjects are wrongly described. For instance, St Martha with the dragon is mistaken for St George (no 7). We learn from these notes that the north transept window had six panels which corresponded with those in the south transept. Of the six, four are no longer in the church. They were (i) Christ in the house of Simon, (ii) the martyrdom of St John the Baptist, (iii) St Elizabeth of Hungary or one of the Acts of Mercy, feeding the hungry, (iv) Christ as the good shepherd (this was stated to be modern). Of these, two are still in the church, that of St John the Evangelist (no 53) in the vestry, and

in the second window from the west in the north wall that of St John the Baptist (no 44). The latter takes the place of a roundel of Esau selling his birthright which has vanished. In the south chancel window the panel depicting Christ as the good shepherd (no 24) has replaced one of the Presentation in the temple (also lost). The Victorian panel in the south transept (no 16) replaced a Madonna and Child which is no longer in the church. She stood crowned and nimbed on a crescent moon in a mandorla with an angel in each top corner.

Of the 46 Netherlandish panels there are eighteen roundels, fifteen oval or elliptical and thirteen rectangular. Seven depict Old Testament stories, five the Apocrypha, twelve the life of Christ, sixteen depict saints and there are six domestic scenes or unknown scenes.

As it is the exception for a glass painter to sign a panel there is no attribution to any individual glazier. Of the two thousand roundels and small panels that the author has photographed in the United Kingdom there is not one with a signature. Preibisz (1911, 52) in his descriptions of glass paintings after designs of Heemskerck writes that the panels were the work of 'unknown Netherlandish glass painters.' It is so with the glass at Rownhams.

However, it has been possible to find the sources of five of the designs, nos 2, 11, 14, 31 and 32. There are no books that deal with the designs used by glaziers. They copied drawings or prints mainly of the 15th and 16th centuries some which no longer exist. There are illustrated books of the complete prints of a few well known artists and Hollstein's *Catalogue* (1949) is a useful source of information but it is sparsely illustrated. The author's main finds have come from the Print Rooms of European museums and it is fortunate that the British Museum has a very large collection. When no print or drawing can be found it is sometimes possible to suggest an attribution on stylistic evidence, in particular for nos 1, 3, 9, 12, 17, 20 and 22.

In the nave each window has two trefoil headed lights and there are three panels placed one above the other in each light



Fig 4. Rownhams: no 11, the story of Tobias, Tobias healing Tobias, Netherlandish, after Symon Novellamus, 17th century.

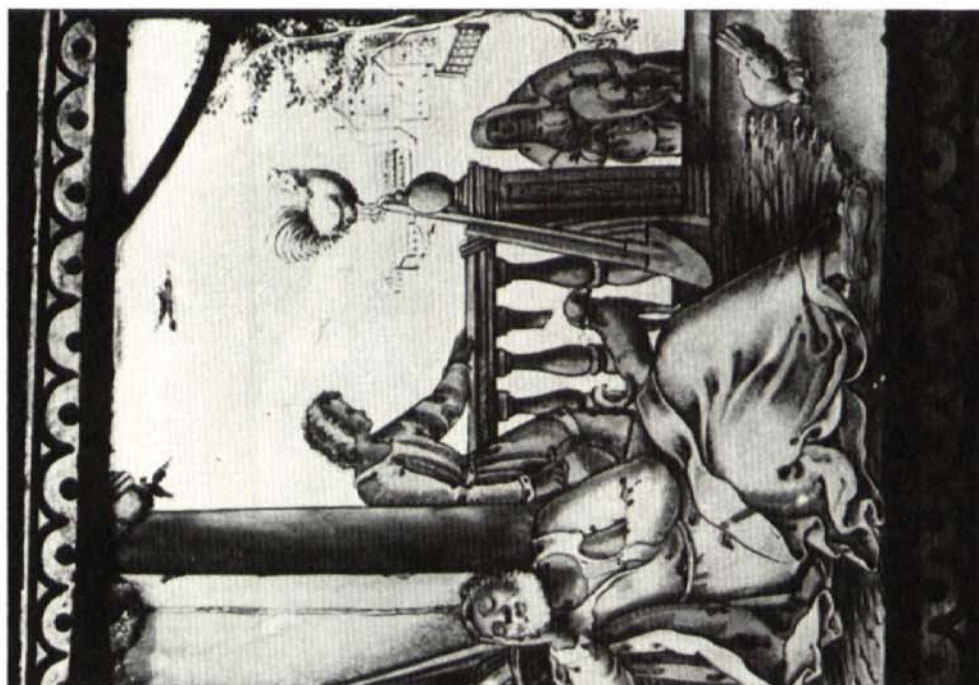


Fig 3. Rownhams: no. 8, the story of Tobias, Tobit asleep, Netherlandish, Dutch, 17th century.



Fig 6. Rownhams: no 36, an unknown domestic scene, Netherlandish, Dutch, 17th century.



Fig 5. Rownhams: no 14, the last judgement, Netherlandish, after Heemskerck, late 16th/early 17th century.



Fig 7. Rownhams: no 20, the spies returning with the grapes (*Numbers XIII v 27*), Netherlandish, possibly Antwerp, 17th century.



Fig 8. Rownhams: no 37, St Martin, Netherlandish, Flemish, c 1525.



Fig 9. Rownhams: no 41, Isaac blessing Jacob, Netherlandish, school of Vellert, c 1525.

making six in each window. A border of leaves in paint and yellow stain provides a framework for each light. The leaf form appears to be a cross between a hawthorn leaf and a vine. Each panel has a small stylised border and is set upon a background of quarries with a stylised flower design in paint and yellow stain. The Netherlandish panels stand out well from the background and illustrate Winston's words in his *Memoirs* (1865, 18) 'Ward stands supreme as a master of ornamental detail.' In the transept the quarries are similar but the borders alternate between red leaves and yellow stained ones. The windows in the chancel have borders of stiff leaved foliage and the panels are set upon fragments of 16th, 17th and 19th century glass. As some of the 16th fragments appear to be English they probably came from another church.

Perhaps Ward had a store of old glass or at least he knew how to acquire it. The background gives a colourful effect and as

some of the 17th century panels are also bright they are not too overshadowed.

It is a pity that so much of the glass has faded and that so many panels are heavily leaded. There are photographs in the vestry of some of the panels taken in the early part of this century and they are much clearer. When the writer visited the church in 1969 the north chancel window was bulging and looked in a bad state. In 1980 a vandal threw a stone through this window which fortunately damaged only the background. As the window had to be re-glazed, the opportunity was taken to restore it and to put wire guards over it and all the other windows.

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Fig 10. Rownhams: no 42, Jonah fleeing from God's presence, Netherlandish, late 16th/early 17th century.

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Fig 11. Rownhams: no 53, St John the Evangelist, Netherlandish, Flemish, c 1525.

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Author: Dr W Cole LVO FSA, Barnacre, Wood Road, Hindhead, Surrey GU26 2PX.

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