

(v) MEDIEVAL STAINED GLASS

If the wholesale destruction of medieval stained glass during the Second World War were not sufficient incentive in itself, any

serious project for the comprehensive recording of surviving material of this fragile and gracious kind would commend itself as an overdue and essential contribution to art-history and iconography. It was in fact left to the Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (C.I.H.A.) at Berne in 1951 to make the first practical proposal for a corpus of medieval stained glass on an international scale. And in 1954 the Union Académique Internationale (U.A.I.), after securing the unanimous consent of its member-academics, lent prestige to the proposal by adding it to the fifteen other enterprises then under its patronage. By so doing it was able to obtain from UNESCO through the Conseil International de la Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines (C.I.P.S.H.) an initial grant of \$1,000 for each of two annual volumes during the period 1954-7.

In its early days the project was actively supported by France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy. Others followed, and in November 1955 steps were taken to involve Great Britain. Professor Dr. Hans R. Hahnloser, Treasurer-Secretary of C.I.H.A., wrote to Sir Charles Webster and Professor (Sir) Roger Mynors—both of them closely interested in the U.A.I. and its children—a reasoned plea to interest the British Academy in the matter and a request for advice in the formation of a National Committee to organize the British contribution.

It is fair to say that the British reaction to the invitation was concisely expressed by Roger Mynors: 'Glorious Idea. But what do we use for money?' That wise observation (incidentally from one to whom, in spite of his protest that it was no business of his except as an amateur, the project in its early stages owed much helpful counsel) marked the beginning of a somewhat lengthy but ultimately successful series of interchanges which may in the long view be profitably curtailed. Briefly, the matter was referred in proper routine to Section XI (History of Art) which, on 11 January 1956, gave 'full support to the project for the Corpus Vitrearum' and proposed the setting-up of a national committee for Great Britain. A week later the Council of the Academy agreed, and proposed as members of the committee: Professor Francis Wormald (Chairman), Professor (Sir) Anthony Blunt, E. A. Lane (Victoria and Albert Museum), Professor (Sir) Roger Mynors, Dr. W. Oakeshott (Rector of Lincoln College), G. F. Webb, Dr. Christopher Woodforde, and Dr. G. Zarnecki. Dr. Oakeshott declined membership, not from lack of interest but because of an excess of it; as a Pilgrim Trustee he anticipated a somewhat embarrassing personal position if the new

Committee should, as it might well do, see fit to approach his Trust for funds.

The British participation was now nominally on its feet; it still had to learn to walk. From its first meeting on 5 July 1956, the Corpus Vitrearum Committee under the vigorous leadership of Professor Wormald got down to work upon its two initial problems: organization and finance. A year later (2 July 1957) it was able to record appreciable action under both heads.

As to organization, with his welcome consent the Revd. Dr. Christopher Woodforde of New College, as the foremost English scholar in the field, had been saddled with the task of the preliminary survey of England, county by county, to discover approximately how much medieval glass had already been discovered and photographed. His report was not encouraging. A great part of the problem still remained quite untouched and such of the work as had been attempted in the past was largely superficial. It was recommended that, as a first requisite, a 'pilot' volume should be prepared covering the glass of three counties: Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, and Oxfordshire which, it was thought, would provide both a fair sample of the fragmentary material, still largely unknown, in village churches, and also (in Oxford itself) some well preserved and well documented glass of high quality. Apart from Oxford, this would mean the examination and recording roughly of 65 'vitriferous' churches in Berkshire, 65 in Buckinghamshire, and 80 in Oxfordshire. Such a 'pilot' volume would provide not only a part of the Corpus but would enable the Committee to formulate a considered policy for the rest of the scheme.

An investigating staff of three persons would be required: a director of the survey (Dr. Woodforde), a photographer, and a draughtsman. Towards this staff and its equipment, the Director of the Courtauld Institute (Sir Anthony Blunt) offered the Committee the use of the Institute's photographer, together with the Institute's photographic van. But there would remain the appreciable costs of travelling and other incidental expenses, and the total annual sum foreseen was unlikely to be less than £1,650.

This raised the thorny question of finance. Here the Council of the Academy, whether prompted or by its own normal provision, had already on the 22 May 1957 'agreed to authorise the officers at their discretion to forward to the Pilgrim Trust an application, to be submitted by the Corpus Vitrearum Committee, for a grant towards the preparation of a pilot volume on the medieval glass of Berks, Bucks and Oxon'. At its meeting on 2 July, the Committee

approved a manifesto for submission to the long-suffering Pilgrims, and this, suitably wrapped up, was sent by the Academy's Secretary to Lord Kilmaine as Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust on 8 July. The reply was immediate and showed the Trust's traditional and instant understanding: 'I am glad to be able to tell you that my Trustees voted a grant of £1,650 towards the preparation of material for a "pilot" volume . . . I enclose a cheque for £1,650.' The date was the 1 August 1957.

All should now have been well, for a while, in respect of the pilot scheme. But alas it was not. Disastrously, the chief pilot himself fell overboard. In 1959 Christopher Woodforde was translated to the Deanery of Wells and medieval glass knew him no more. In fact, for some time before his departure very little of a practical kind had happened to his special project. Time slipped by, not (as will shortly be seen) in utter idleness but without determined direction. At last, on the 12 July 1961, the Committee clearly and firmly reviewed the whole situation and in effect prepared for a fresh start.

First there was the languishing pilot scheme. The remedy was not, in principle, hard to see. In his report to the Academy's Secretary on 17 July 1961, Professor Wormald observed:

The Committee was quite clear that the scheme for producing any volume of the Corpus will be wrecked if there cannot be someone who can work on the job full-time. The whole study of glass in this country has been for years hag-ridden by amateurs, and I for one am convinced that we shall never get anywhere unless we can have somebody doing it all the time. Peter Newton, a young student of the Courtauld Institute who has just completed a large thesis on stained glass in the Midlands, would do this very well. . . . What we should like is for the Academy to employ him full-time for X number of years.

Meanwhile, Peter Newton secured a Research Fellowship at the Barber Institute at Birmingham for the next two years and during that period would be in a position, for the refund of expenses only, to complete or at least to continue intermittently the delayed pilot scheme.

And so from the end of August 1961 preliminary work on the three counties was resumed under the new leadership. On the 6 November, Wormald wrote: 'Newton has found that there are a great many more churches in those counties having fragments of ancient glass than either Woodforde or Mynors suspected. . . . So you can see that we are not really in a position to do much at the minute about asking for money . . .' It became rapidly clear, however, that more money was precisely the urgent

pre-condition now required for sustained progress. Above all, it was essential to provide for and to regularize the services of P. A. Newton for a period of at least three years; i.e. well beyond the term of his fellowship. Accordingly, in February 1962 Professor Wormald concluded a further review with a demand for 'a grant from the Academy of £1,300 per annum for three years in order to complete the pilot volume'. The reply from the Academy's Secretary was:

May I say, with every possible and rather special goodwill to the *Vitreae*, that there is not the slightest hope of getting £1,300 out of the Academy for this scheme. Whitehall is very rigorous this year in the matter of grants. . . . But this does mean looking elsewhere. Incidentally I understand that there is a balance in hand of £1,230 from the Pilgrim Trust grant. If this amount could now be extended to cover three years at the same figure per annum, we should have time to look round for other sources . . .

Briefly again, Wormald and the Secretary once more approached our faithfulest friends the Pilgrims, with the happy sequel that a letter from Lord Kilmaine to the Secretary on 15 May 1962 contained the following generous sentence: 'My Trustees were glad to vote a further grant of £2,000 to provide the salary of Dr. P. A. Newton at the rate of £1,000 p.a. for the two years 1963-64 and 1964-65, it being understood that you already have a more than sufficient balance from our previous grant to cover the salary for 1962-63'. It may here be added that in August 1962 C.I.P.S.H. added a contribution of \$925 to the Committee's voracious purse.

As things turned out, Dr. Newton did not begin full-time work for the Corpus Vitrearum Committee until the 1 January 1964, when for administrative convenience he was attached to the Courtauld Institute. By the end of that year he was able to report that the medieval glass in the city and county of Oxford had all been noted and photographed. Financial provision was still available from the Pilgrim donation for 1965, and work proceeded on iconographical and other aspects of the Oxford material. And then in November the Committee was confronted by a second set-back: the invaluable Dr. Newton was appointed to a Lectureship in the University of York. Happily this event did not completely sever his association with the pilot project, which continues to profit from time to time from his interest and intervention. But it did necessarily interfere with the smooth development of the work, and was a factor in its displacement as a priority scheme by another great enterprise which had since 1961 given

considerable exercise to the minds of the Committee. Additional delay in 1968 was occasioned by Dr. Newton's illness, though in January 1969 the Committee was able to see and approve a specimen 'opening' of the Oxford volume.

Reference has been made above to an important meeting of the Committee on the 12 July 1961 when there was a general stock-taking of the progress (or otherwise) of the Glass project as a whole. An item on the agenda was 'Correspondence with the Provost of King's College, Cambridge', and eight or nine years later the substance of that correspondence still shapes the Committee's proceedings.

The gist of the Provost's (Noel Annan's) letters was first that Mr. Hilary Wayment, an authority on the stained glass of King's College chapel, had asked him whether the College would be prepared to help him financially in the preparation and publishing of a major work on the glass, and secondly, was there any chance of the photographs of the glass, with Wayment's text, being published in the *Corpus Vitrearum Medii Aevi*. If there were, it would be a mistake to envisage independent publication.

Professor Wormald's replies were (a) that certainly Wayment's project was worthy of encouragement, but (b) that the *Corpus* was being produced under the auspices of UNESCO who would be expected to give a grant towards publication but would not assist in any preparatory work such as salaries, expenses, and photography. These charges fell upon each country participating in the scheme. Moreover, whilst some money for publication could be got from UNESCO, the balance would have to be found from English sources. But he would like to refer the correspondence to the British Academy.

To the Academy's Secretary, Wormald wrote (21 June 1961):

It seems to me that we are being offered *gratis*, as far as preparation and photography are concerned, a volume which would certainly be (a) very splendid to look at, (b) very useful. With everyone working on 16th century mannerist art we should get here a volume which would certainly excite a good deal of interest and would incidentally be dealing with a single 16th century monument of prime importance. It does appear, however, that while King's will be ready and willing to support the preparation of the volume as well as making the remarkable set of photographs which they have available, they may well jib at paying for the whole publication. . . . I imagine that UNESCO would do something for us, but I am pretty certain that the UNESCO contribution would not cover the whole of publication expenditure. I cannot imagine

that at this stage the Academy could agree to publishing the volume. On the other hand I should like to be able to encourage the Provost. . . .

To this the Secretary:

The correspondence seems to me to carry the matter far enough to enable the Committee to make a fairly solid resolution for our Council at its next meeting. Meanwhile we must keep Annan gently on the boil.

In reporting the meeting of the Corpus Vitrearum Committee on 12 July 1961, Professor Wormald records that the King's College Cambridge glass

was discussed very fully and by good fortune Kenneth Harrison, formerly of King's, who knows a good deal about the glass, was present. He has been discussing the whole question with the Provost and put forward an alternative suggestion to the one originally given to us, namely that the King's windows should be a joint effort in which Arthur Lane¹ should make a description of the windows and Wayment, who, as you may remember, was to have done the whole of the description and the art-historical introduction, should confine himself to the art-historical introduction alone. This would be a good arrangement, because Lane is very well acquainted with the King's glass and has already done some descriptions of it. On the other hand Wayment knows the whole history of North French and Belgian glass-painting extremely well and has also an excellent knowledge of late Flemish art, which is essential for anybody studying the King's windows. The financial arrangements, of course, remain to be worked out, but it is possible that King's would be prepared to assist with Lane's expenses and I have even suggested in a letter to the Provost that he would require some sort of honorarium. Wayment would certainly need paying as well. From what Harrison says it seems clear that King's, if it was to pay for the expenses of producing the material, would be reluctant to pay for the actual printing and production of the book, and presumably the Academy would have to raise some funds for this. After all the scheme for the Corpus Vitrearum has been officially adopted by the Academy and we may assume that it will expect to pay some parts of the cost. I have written to the Provost on these lines. I hope I have not gone too far!

Once more to summarize: work on the King's glass eventually got under way approximately along the lines suggested. In January 1969 Mr. Wayment was able to report the completion of the physical survey of the glass, a task in which he had had the advantage of the co-operation of Mr. Dennis King who, as an experimental restorer of ancient glass, had been an exceedingly useful

¹ Died in 1963. Thereafter in fact Hilary Wayment catalogued the glass and Kenneth Harrison prepared the art-historical introduction.

associate (later member) of the Committee since 1965. Amongst the new findings in the process of this work, it was of interest to note:

- i. The identification of one of the glaziers with an anonymous Fleming whose work is also to be seen in the church at Fairford, Gloucestershire.
- ii. The probability that much of the work of restoration previously assumed to belong to the nineteenth century derives in fact from the eighteenth century or earlier, and that the eighteenth century glaziers, though ill supplied in pot-metal, showed an unsuspected skill in painting and staining white glass for replacements.
- iii. The proof of Mr. C. Morris's theory that the figure of Solomon (above the Adoration of the Magi) was also intended to represent King Henry VIII.¹
- iv. New evidence, gleaned from the archives in Amsterdam and Antwerp, on the life of Dieric Vellart, the presumed designer of most of the great windows.

At this point, the *Corpus Vitrearum* passes out of the present chronicle, leaving the Committee, under its devoted Chairman, busily beginning to feed the King's volume into the Oxford University Press and simultaneously, no doubt, occupied no less busily with the eternal and merciless but never insoluble problems of finance.

The present recorder would add a final *cri de coeur*, final in the present context but actually dating back to 6 August 1957. On that day I wrote a word of thanks to Francis Wormald in acknowledgement of his characteristic congratulations on our securing the interest of the Pilgrim Trust:

Thank you for your kindly note. I, too, am delighted that the Pilgrim Trust saw the light even through stained glass darkly. But one thing does rather concern me in the matter of this survey. Under modern conditions no photographic survey *unless in colour* will conform with the sort of standards we should set ourselves. I am firmly convinced that every piece of stained glass worthy of individual record should be photographed in colour, now. Even though this will add appreciably to the cost of the whole business, the answer is, Get more money for it and do it properly while we are about it.

In 1969 this is even truer and more feasible than in 1957. But the published volumes make in this regard a poor showing. For example at random, the fat Vol. III of Switzerland has only 18

¹ An identification which I am reluctantly unable to find convincing.

plates in colour as against 236 plates in black and white; France I has 8 in colour and 101 in black and white; Austria I has 8 in colour and 24 plates + 309 figs. in black and white. All this and more is below the modern standard; well below the standard required of so essentially colourful a material. It still remains to be seen how far the first English volume will supersede this dreary and archaic norm.