

Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society

NEWSLETTER – Spring 2016

Stained Glass of Buckinghamshire Churches - Website

Like many of us, Cliff and Monica Robinson are people who have had a life-long interest in church architecture. In the 1980s they became involved with the NADFAS Church Recording programme and soon specialised in recording Stained Glass. The publication of certain books in the 1980s and 1990s that catalogued the stained glass of particular counties inspired the Robinsons into more detailed research of the stained glass of Buckinghamshire churches. They used their NADFAS experience and the model of published works, particularly those by Birkin Haward on the 19th century stained glass of Norfolk and Suffolk churches.

They set out to record each church noting the following items for each window, position in the church, number of lights, designer and maker, year installed, maker's mark on the window, subjects portrayed, who a window was dedicated to, and who it was donated by. As we can all imagine, some of these facts can be easy to find, but others can involve extensive research in many places such as local, church, and diocesan records, and local newspaper reports. There are also records of some of the famous stained glass designers and makers. They can vary from published works, the research of other enthusiasts, and items still held by the descendants of the craftsmen involved. Thankfully, they also saw it was very important to record the evidence for an attribution once it had been made.

They also soon realised the importance of photographing the windows they researched and over many years accumulated a large number of photographs along with a vast amount of information, and correspondence relating to their searches. They had originally thought their work might make a book, but realised that would not be practical. With the help of their son, the results of their research was entered in a database and around 2000 copies of a CD were produced giving limited availability to their researches.

From 2003 until 2014 the information and photographs were put on a website, www.bucksstainedglass.org.uk which I have used myself for many years. They continued with their research and took more photographs, so by the end of 2014 they had included around 250 churches, with details of over 1600 windows, with over 3600 photographs. The website had become highly respected, and you will find it mentioned on many other websites about stained glass and church architecture.

In 2015 I was disappointed to find that the website was no longer available, although it had been loaded into the British Library's Web Archive, so can still be seen there. In August 2015 I contacted Cliff and Monica Robinson and they told me that they could not continue to keep it going any more. They had tried to find somebody to take it over, but without success. Before long I had asked them if they would consider handing it over to me, to get it back on line, with a view to expanding it in the future. I have to say they were absolutely delighted, and by mid October I had collected their vast amount of research material from them.

The very same week, I was in contact with somebody else who was also disappointed to find that the website had disappeared. I am delighted to say that he, Peter Strutt, and myself have now been working together on the project for 4 months. After only 2 weeks we had the website back on line in the same format as before. The difference is that it has a new name, partly to reflect the fact that it will only cover the stained glass in churches and chapels, and not other buildings. In time, I also plan that it will include items on the architecture and history of Buckinghamshire Churches, something that has been an ambition of mine for many years.

Particularly for the technically minded amongst you, the website has had web pages built from the database accessed by indexes also built from the same database. For the last 3 months we have been working on a completely new system where users will be able to search by many criteria and all information will be gathered live into pages available instantly for users. I have to tell you it is Peter who has been able to build all this, and certainly not me. I just dream up seemingly impossible ideas for him to work on, but he always finds the answers to make things happen.

The crux of all this is that, hopefully by the time you read this, we will be presenting the "Stained Glass of Buckinghamshire Churches" in a new format, with extra information available, and as a live system, will

always be completely up to date with any additions or changes we make. You can find it at www.buckschurches.uk

For the future, I have already started taking new photographs for existing windows and churches on the website, often to include more detailed photographs. As entries for a church are updated, they will be accompanied by a plan of each church. I also want to add other windows, some of them patterned glass, which have not all been included. There are also many new windows to be added, and another ambition is to include more glass in Chapels.

Users will be able to search by Church, Craftsmen (Artists or Makers), Makers Marks, Dedictees, Donors and Dates. We will also be including more background information, such as potted biographies of stained glass craftsmen, links to individual church web sites, and information about general books and websites on stained glass. There will also be a record of the latest updates made to the website.

Some BAS members will have received an email from me in the Autumn about this, and I have to say I have been greatly encouraged by the number of people who responded saying they were pleased to hear about our re-instating the Robinson's meticulous research work onto the internet.

Any of you who know me from our BAS Church Crawls, will know that when I talk of Buckinghamshire, I mean to include the whole historic county, from Lavendon down to Wraysbury. Please feel free to let me know of any new stained glass windows being fitted in your local churches. There is access to a contact form on every page of the website, or email me direct.

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