

LIONEL GREEN speculates about the MONASTIC GLASS OF MERTON

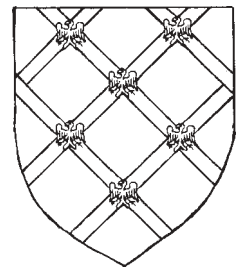
It would seem that there is no known glass in existence that was once part of the important priory of Merton. The Augustinian canons were noted for their churches with windows of stained glass¹, affording a 'visual aid' not only in the church, but in the cloisters and other conventual buildings.

There are many examples of monastic glass finding its way to neighbouring churches. In the church of St Anthony, Cartmel Fells, is some good medieval English and Flemish glass which came from the cloister and claustral buildings of Cartmel (Augustinian) Priory. Other glass from this priory is in St Martin's church, Windermere.

The east window of Morden church contains glass taken from the pre-1636 church which, according to unfounded tradition, came from Merton Priory. It contained stories from the Old Testament, including Jonah and the whale, and Abraham's sacrifice. Large quantities of broken glass were unearthed during excavations at Merton Priory in 1988. These were located at the south end of the infirmary hall, which suggests that a large window existed, allowing much of God's light to enter the sick-quarters of the Priory.

Glass in Merton parish church

Some ancient glass exists in Merton Church, consisting of two armorial shields and other small pieces. One shows the Royal Arms of Henry IV (c.1410), depicting the three golden lilies of France on a blue field quartered with the three golden leopards of England on a red field. The other shield shows the arms of Merton Priory, a blue fret of six interlaced bars on a field of gold. At each crossing is a silver eagle with outspread wings. The glass is in a window high up in the north aisle and was placed there in 1910. Tracing a possible history of this glass, there is an entry in the parish magazine for March 1891 that "Mr Quartermain has kindly presented to the Vestry ... a leaded fretwork containing pieces of old glass which were in one of the chancel windows ..." This would seem to agree with the statement in Manning and Bray (1804)² that "the arms of England and those of the Priory [are] in the chancel window". In 1792 Daniel Lysons³ confirms that "in the chancel window are some remains of painted glass, amongst which are to be seen the arms of England, and those of the priory of Merton ...".



This glass could have been provided by the Priory in the 15th century. This would seem to be a more acceptable explanation than that it appeared at the time of the dissolution of the Priory.

Glass in Carshalton church

About 1148 Faramus de Boulogne provided a church at Carshalton and gave the advowson to Merton Priory. The chancel was similar to that at Merton, dating from early in the 13th century, with lancet windows. In the British Library is the manuscript collection⁴ of Nicholas Charles, Lancaster Herald 1609-13, which contains a reference to some armorial glass in Carshalton church.

"These stand in the great east chauncell windowe. Three shields follow in a row, from left to right bearing (1) France and England quarterly within a bordure compony arg and vert (2) France and England quarterly (3) Or fretty with eagles arg at the crossings of the fret, for Merton Priory."

The three shields fit in with a triple lancet arrangement of the east window and the later 15th-century triple-light window which was blocked up in 1811⁵. Vincent's Visitation of Surrey 1623 refers to "several coats which were formerly in a window of the north aisle belonging to families of Burley, Sarnesfield and Earls of Somerset". Lysons refers to the same glass in the windows of the north aisle which had been present "before the alterations when the aisles were raised in brick"⁶. No mention is made of glass in the chancel east window.

There is no record of architectural changes in the 17th century, but many took place early in the 18th century. The incumbent in the latter part of the 17th century was John Nelme who held Beddington in plurality with Carshalton from 1684. He died in 1703 and was buried at Beddington⁷. The parish registers had not been kept properly and his successor began a new register in 1703. This was William Helliars, who was instituted on 15 November 1703, and immediately changes took place. The south aisle of the original church was altered to accommodate the Scawen family chapel, and in 1725/6 changes to the north aisle involved the blocking of the east window of the north aisle for the Fellows monument and chapel⁸.

Could this church also have been presented with glass showing the arms of the priory in the 15th century, or is there the possibility that the Carshalton glass found its way to Merton?

1 F M Powicke - introduction to W Daniel *The Life of Alfred* 1950 p lxxii 2 Manning & Bray *The History & Antiquities of Surrey* Vol 1 1804 p 259

3 D Lysons *The Environs of London* 1792 Vol 1 p 346

5 A C Skelton in *Sy Arch.* 30 (1966) p 18

7 Manning and Bray *op cit* Vol 2 1806 p 533f

4 BL Lansdowne MS 874 fo.129

6 D Lysons *op cit* p 1299 - PAGE 3

8 A C Skelton *op cit* p 3