19th and 20th Century Stained Glass in Aotearoa New Zealand

Consideration of the collection of both indigenous and imported 19th and 20th century stained-glass windows in New Zealand offers much to the wider study of post-medieval work. Because of the relative proximity of Australia to New Zealand and their similar background as former British colonies with indigenous cultures, it is especially interesting to compare the collections in both countries. Suffice to say that Northern Hemisphere art historians tend to lump Australia and New Zealand together without addressing the differences.

A preliminary catalogue of New Zealand’s stained glass was undertaken by the author in the 1980s, but no inventory exists of Australia’s collection. The need for such a catalogue is acknowledged and is planned. Therefore, I am offering some main conclusions from analysis of the New Zealand collection and positing some similarities with, but also crucial differences from Australia, which will be interesting to refine when an inventory is finished. With regard to Australia, my suggestions are based on personal observation, study of European studio records and discussions with Australian historians.

19th and 20th century stained glass has been little researched and its importance overlooked. However, much can be deduced about a culture or society by the type of stained glass which it has chosen to install. This is probably truer of secular work which reflects individual attitudes, aspirations and lifestyles. While ecclesiastical stained glass is revealing on broader issues.

There are several key differences between the foundation and development of Australia and New Zealand which have had an effect on the type of stained glass imported and executed locally, and the iconography chosen. New Zealand was colonised in 1840, later than Australia. It nearly became French territory. Shortly after colonisation the British Government drew up the Treaty of Waitangi with the Maori which gave the Maori their own sovereignty and equal rights. New Zealand is now openly bi-cultural. New Zealand was settled predominantly by people from the United Kingdom and Ireland and retained strong ties with these countries until the 1970s when Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC). Importantly, New Zealand was colonised largely at the height of the Gothic Revival period which meant an extensive building program of churches and secular dwellings incorporating the newly fashionable adornment, stained-glass windows.

The majority of windows in New Zealand were imported from England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Germany and Belgium. Surprisingly very few came from Australia. The design and execution of stained-glass windows did not begin in New Zealand until about 1895.

In contrast stained glass studios began earlier in Australia. It would appear that Australia came to rely on these studios to a greater degree, sooner. I also sense there is little reflection of Aboriginal culture in stained glass in Australia.

New Zealand has an interesting collection of Victorian stained glass dating from about 1845 to 1870 after which the quality of design declines. The earliest work

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is by William Wailes of Newcastle and there are excellent 1860s works from Joseph Bell and Sons of Bristol, Heaton, Butler & Bayne and James Powell & Sons, London. Australia has a more diverse selection of Victorian stained glass from this early period with interesting examples by artists such as Clutterbuck, who are not represented in New Zealand.

Vandalism and neglect have characterised the treatment of Victorian stained glass in New Zealand, reflecting a global attitude that it was of little value. One outstanding set of stained glass from a demolished chapel was destined for the rubbish dump, but has been rescued and housed in an art museum. It includes a work of 1864 by William Warrington and an 1868 window by Clayton & Bell. Historic agencies in New Zealand have become more aware of the heritage of stained glass and now act accordingly to protect it.

Informed English clergy and Gothic Revival architects in New Zealand, strongly influenced by the ecclesiologists, strictly favoured Heaton, Butler & Bayne, Lavers, Barraud & Westlake and Clayton & Bell of London. So these studios executed the majority of Victorian stained glass. Both N. W. Lavers and F. P. Barraud appear to have been friends of colonial architect B. W. Mountfort who designed some windows himself. Other English architects such as William Butterfield, who planned buildings for New Zealand, also designed stained glass for them.

The execution of secular stained glass began in New Zealand, principally in Dunedin, in about 1895 by a New Zealand artist, Robert Fraser. He incorporated neo-Baroque and Renaissance motifs, taken from European catalogues, with aspects of New Zealand landscape and life.

There is much 19th century stained glass in New Zealand from France. French settlers came to New Zealand in the 1840s with Roman Catholic priests and nuns who imported stained glass from the home of their orders. Therefore there are examples by Lorin of Chartres, Dufrière from Grigny, Lucien Bégule of Lyon and Lobin of Tours among others.

New Zealand differs from Australia in the quality and diversity of its imported 20th century stained glass. There is a larger collection of British and Irish Arts and Crafts Movement work in New Zealand, with examples by Veronica Whall, Margaret Chilton, Joseph Nuttens, Arnold Robinson, Karl Parsons, John Bonnor and the Camm family among others. There is a stunning set of An Tur Gloine windows in the Karori Crematorium Chapel in Wellington. There were relatives, colleagues and friends of many of these artists living in New Zealand which in part accounts for the wide selection here.

One of the most interesting aspects about New Zealand’s 20th century imported collection is that there are examples by many British artists whose work is rarely found or not found at all outside the United Kingdom. Studio records prove this observation. Again this situation is attributable to New Zealand’s close links...
with the United Kingdom and some informed and wealthy donors. For example, there are rare works by Scots David Gauld, William Wilson and Rosemary Rutherford, John Piper and Patrick Reyntiens from England.

Analysis of the country of origin and the iconography of both imported and indigenous windows in New Zealand reveals much about religious and political demarcation. Roman Catholics were in a minority and stained glass in Catholic churches is almost exclusively from French studios in the 19th century, but from German studios in the 20th century. There is the notable exception of windows from John Hardman & Co of Birmingham, patronised because of its Catholic ownership.

Further, the iconography depicted in most Catholic stained glass is based on high Renaissance, Baroque or popular culture ‘religious’ paintings. Roman Catholic stained glass in New Zealand therefore reinforces the seat of authority as Rome.

In direct contrast stained glass in Church of England buildings (the dominant denomination), where it is based on a pictorial source, almost exclusively quotes pre-Raphaelite and late 19th century English religious paintings.

By analysing the iconography of stained glass in New Zealand it is possible to chart the concept of a post-colonial society developing its own identity, and observe religious and political propaganda or imperialism as well as changing attitudes to race.

Depiction of New Zealand figures and events in Victorian and arts and crafts movement ecclesiastical stained glass is rare. The turning point came after the First World War and the carnage of Anzacs at Gallipoli and elsewhere. This brought a flood of memorials to commemorate the dead and those who served. The grief over the decimation of a nation’s youth is evident in stained-glass windows in New Zealand. This also meant that studies abroad suddenly had to come to terms with depicting New Zealand iconography – with mixed results. In numerous cases photographs were used so that uniform and facial details were correct.

While New Zealanders began to see themselves in stained glass windows, British imperialism asserted itself in other works. One of the most extraordinary examples is a large-scale work designed by Martin Travers as a First World War memorial. It was not completed until close to the time of the outbreak of the Second World War because the artist was forced to redesign the work, as his initial concept included German historical figures. The final work resembles the coastline of England.

Tied in with a nation’s emerging sense of self is acceptance and celebration of native cultures. While there is very little depiction of Maori in 19th century stained glass, such depictions appear more towards the turn of the century in

Figure 2 St Bridget of Ireland: Community of the Sacred Name, Christchurch, New Zealand. Designed and made by Veronica Whall in London, 1928-29. (Photograph: Author)
secular windows; however somewhat as curiosities and most carving depicted is not accurate. For European studios the thought of exotic and savage south sea cultures provided room for fertile imaginations and many theatrical versions of the Martyrdom of St Peter Chanel were executed. A source of cultural insensitivity are versions of The Binding of the Devil showing a dark-skinned devil.

Post Second World War imported work and work by New Zealand studios show increasing aspects of New Zealand. This was a result of more research by artists, and greater input from donors ensuring that accurate details were incorporated.

The enormous prosperity of the 1950s and 1960s brought the commissioning of many windows, mostly from Powell's – indeed New Zealand was one of their biggest markets. The majority of windows from this era depict some aspect of New Zealand’s colonial history, landscape or Maori history, as many regions celebrated centenaries of white settlement.

New Zealand studios fared better after the Second World War but still found it hard to compete for commissions, especially with the English studios. One of the most accomplished designers was Frederick Ellis who trained in England in the arts and crafts tradition before settling in New Zealand. He designed windows for Miller Studios in Dunedin which executed numerous works with other artists, reflecting New Zealand society more and more. In the 1950s Dutch-born immigrant Martin Roestenburg executed many windows showing a Maori holy family, an image which would not have been commissioned before the 1950s and surely reflects a wider intermingling of Maori and Pakeha culture.

Today, numerous glass artists work in New Zealand in non-traditional styles influenced greatly by European and North American design reworked in response to New Zealand landscape and life.