

A window onto the world of conservation

Stained Glass Conservator Elizabeth Hippisley-Cox's inspiring experience of a William Morris Craft Fellowship

Having spent last year travelling the UK on the William Morris Craft Fellowship, when I got back home I began to reflect on what had been a truly unique experience. The programme is named after that great man who, amongst his many other achievements, helped establish the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) in 1877, Europe's very first building conservation organisation. Underpinned by the philosophy of minimal intervention and honest repair outlined in SPAB's 'Manifesto', the organisation continues to hold these principles at the core of all its activities today.

Last year the Fellowship celebrated its thirtieth anniversary and since its genesis in 1986 it has given over one hundred craftspeople working on historic buildings the chance to step away from the workbench/scaffold/microscope and go behind the scenes of a great many recent and on-going conservation projects across the UK. Every year a group of three or four Fellows are chosen to travel together, guided and hosted by

the architects, surveyors, engineers, conservators and craftspeople working on these fascinating projects.

For a stained glass conservator, the Fellowship was a great way to get better acquainted with the multitude of specialists whose task it is to protect the buildings and monuments of the UK. I first entered the world of conservation as a graduate of Medieval Studies in 2009, undertaking an Icon Internship at the York Glaziers Trust. York is a great centre for the study of stained glass, and I worked, studied and trained there until 2015. When I wanted to expand my knowledge and experience, and gain more autonomy over my conservation practice, the Fellowship seemed like a great opportunity.

I had worked on Last Judgement and Apocalypse windows before, but my Fellowship year was the real revelation. We visited somewhere in excess of one hundred and twenty sites, which included workshops, studios, labs, offices, quarries, mills, castles, churches, chapels, cathedrals, historic houses,

Glass painting at the studio of Jim Budd ACR





Learning to make Collyweston stone slates with David Ellis



Learning about thatching with Fellow Tom Dunbar



Glass blowing at English Antique Glass



Timber panel repairs at Barnstaple with conservation carpenter and Fellow Ben Hornberger

bridges, music halls, and we even got to help repair a historic dog kennel. At each visit we were able to ask questions and spend time discussing the philosophical and practical details of each intervention. Visits would often end in a trip to the pub, and on occasion discussions would continue over dinner and well into the night!

At the final stage of the journey, Fellows can choose to focus on particular skills they would like to develop, and take longer placements with professionals and craftspeople. I used some of this time to explore the craft and manufacturing processes of the materials of stained glass. I visited a glass paint manufacturer in France, saw lead extrusion and milling, and spent time at English Antique Glass near Redditch, which is sadly the last place in the UK to produce flat mouth-blown antique or 'cylinder' glass.

The sourcing of appropriate traditional materials, and the introduction of modern materials for conservation repairs was a very interesting theme for me, and I recognised a great deal of disparity across the building crafts. A week with Icon Member Jim Budd ACR in Herefordshire also deserves a mention. I was really impressed by the standard of workmanship and attention to detail, and his studio in a converted barn is by far the nicest I have seen to date.

During the final block I was also able to revisit Lincoln Cathedral, where the conservation team were incredibly generous with their time and knowledge. I was able to

undertake some chemical-aided cleaning, learn more about their digital documentation and also experience a Fabric Advisory Committee meeting on the subject of Environmental Protective Glazing.

Previous Fellows make up many of the hosts during the year, and they have advised me that all of the adventures and experiences will be of great use, though never all at once. In the future on a project, something will come up and, like a light-bulb, a memory and a point of reference will help guide a difficult decision. Where the memory fails, the notebooks will still contain the names and numbers you need.

The Fellowship certainly gave me plenty of memories, renewed my passion for conservation, and gave me much more confidence in my ideas and ability to make good judgements. The programme is challenging and stimulating, and I would thoroughly recommend it. Aside from the things you learn, amazing places you see, you will meet some inspirational characters along the way.

Lizzy lives and works in Cumbria. She is Early Career Liaison Officer for the Icon Stained Glass Group, and is happy to be contacted on the subject of the Fellowship and all things conservation.

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