

JAMES HOLMES: A STAINED GLASS ARTIST IN LANCASTER

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Abstract

This paper provides new information and photographs about one of the less-well-known stained-glass firms in Lancaster, James Holmes & Co.

Introduction

Lancaster had become a stained-glass manufacturing centre by the 1870s. The best-known stained-glass company in Lancaster is Shrigley and Hunt, established in 1873 by Arthur Hunt (Waters 2003, 9). At the peak there were seven stained-glass firms in Lancaster. James Holmes & Co. was one of these but, until now, little has been known about the man, the firm and their work. In this paper there are, for the first time, photographs of some of their work.

James Holmes, 1865–1937

James Holmes was born on 27 June 1865 in Beverley, Yorkshire (Population Census 1871). Curiously, later censuses record York as his birthplace. Holmes's grandfather was a Derbyshire man who earned a living as a publican (Population Census 1861). John Holmes (James's father) was born in Lincolnshire and was a carriage painter in York and then a house painter (Population Censuses 1871 and 1881). The family moved to Leeds where, at the age of sixteen, James was listed as a glass stainer (Population Census 1881). On his marriage licence (in 1886) and in the Population Census of 1891 he is recorded as an ecclesiastical glazier. He and his Leeds-born wife Martha had two daughters in Leeds but their third, Edith, was born at Lancaster and was 1 year old in 1901. James's father, John, was now retired and living with his son and family at 81 Balmoral Road in Lancaster (Population Census 1901). A decade later the family was living at 6 Gordon Terrace in Bowerham, Lancaster (Population Census 1911). James is recorded in the 1901 Population Census as a traveller for a stained-glass company, and later as a traveller, either on his own account or for a stained-glass and glass merchant (Population Census 1911). He died at his home, 22 St Paul's Drive in Lancaster, on 13 May 1937, aged 71, and is buried in Scotforth Cemetery in Lancaster (*Lancaster Guardian* 21/05/1937, 1; Find a Grave website). His wife is buried with her husband: she died in May 1949 aged 82.

James Holmes & Co.

Holmes arrived in Lancaster just before the 1901 Census. The first references to his business are in 1909 (*Lancaster Standard and County Advertiser* 9/7/1909, 4 – “cheap window glass”) and in Bulmer's Directory of 1912–3. His premises were on Fenton Street, through the archway on the west side between Nos 6 and 8, though the building no longer exists. The company was also known as the Loyne Ecclesiastical Studios. There was a flurry of newspaper advertisements for the firm's glass business in 1927 (*Morecambe Guardian* 29/01/1927, 5). They show that plain glass and greenhouse glass as well as ecclesiastical glass were being sold. The firm also described itself as ‘plumbers’ merchants’ in their 1925/6 printed catalogue of iron pipe fittings (Lancashire Archives DDX 1291/83). By the 1930s they were also offering French embossed glass and metal casements. They advertised the stained-glass side as being “...under the supervision of one of our Directors, who has had 31 years' experience of this artistic work with a firm of repute”. James Holmes himself is not named but the timing fits his career. The stained-glass work was a specialist element of a diversifying business.

Len Shorrock began his career in stained glass with James Holmes & Co in 1944 and stayed with them until 1948 (*Lancaster Guardian* 26/06/2010, 10; Edwards 2006–07, 65). By this time James Holmes & Co. had joined with and moved to Anthony Bell's premises at Parliament Street (Endnote 1), adding Bell's work on marble chimneypieces to the glass business, which had by then

largely switched from stained glass to leaded-light production (Edwards 2006–07, 66; *Lancaster Guardian* 26/02/2010, 10). The competition from the larger local firms in the stained-glass market would have been stiff. Mr Shorrocks recalls that one of the firm's first post-war commissions was reinstating the stained-glass windows at Barrow-in-Furness Town Hall – the glass having been originally provided by Shrigley & Hunt. After 1950 Shorrocks worked for the better-known, Lancaster stained-glass firm of Abbott & Co. After James Holmes's death in 1937 the Marble Works became the property of R Gardner who retained the old-established names of James Holmes & Co. for the glass business and Anthony Bell & Sons for the metal and marble businesses.

The firm's commissions

Until now there has not been a catalogue of the stained-glass work by James Holmes & Co., unlike the much bigger Lancaster firms such as Shrigley and Hunt and Abbott whose works have been well documented and are often referenced (Hartwell 2009, 761, 745). This paper provides a first draft of such a catalogue for Holmes, the man and the firm, including the works of the Loyne Ecclesiastical Studios, another name under which they traded. Other stained-glass works by Holmes may come to light after further research. Some of the stained-glass work by Holmes can be identified by a signature. Five examples are shown in Figure 1 though some are difficult to read and photograph. The windows can usually be dated by newspaper reports of their unveiling or approximately by the dates on *in memoriam* inscriptions (Figure 17).

St Andrew's Church, Cleveleys, Lancashire (1914). Two-light windows in the chancel (Figures 1, 6 & 7). (Signed window).

Carnforth Congregational Church (1921) A war memorial window in the nave (Figures 1 & 8). (Signed window). (*Lancashire Evening Post* 16/07/1921, 9).

St Thomas's Church, Preston (1924) 'St Luke' which may have come from the church of the same name (Figure 9). (Possible attribution on stylistic grounds, and differs from other windows in the church).

Christ Church, Silloth, Cumbria (c.1929) Nave: 'Feed my lambs' the left window, and 'I am the Vine' the right window. (Figures 1, 2, 11, 12 & 13). (Signed window). (Smith 1994, 87; Edwards 2006–2007, 66).

South Stainmore Chapel of St Stephen, Brough, Cumbria (c.1929.) A window on north wall of nave. (Figures 1, 14, 17). (Signed window). (Smith 1994, 71).

Silverdale Wesleyan Church, Silverdale, Lancashire (1930) Memorial window designed by J T Alexander (Endnote 2) of Loyne Ecclesiastical Studios. (Figure 20). (Signed window). (*Morecambe Guardian* 11/04/1930, 3).

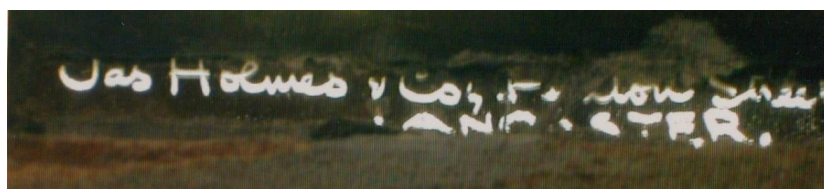
St Laurence Church, Morecambe (1930) Two windows, in the Lady Chapel on the Resurrection, and in the East window on the Ascension. (*Morecambe Guardian* 4/4/1930, 2).

St Peter's Church, Darwen (1931 & 1934) Two windows in the nave. (Figures 1, 3, 10 & 18). (Signed windows).

St John's Church, Waberthwaite, Cumbria (c.1931) East window: Christ the Good Shepherd. (Figures 5 & 16). (Signed window). (Smith 1994, 122; Edwards 2006–2007, 66).

Holy Trinity Church, Morecambe (1939) A window on the south side on the theme of the Good Shepherd. (Figures 1, 4 & 15) (Signed window). (*Morecambe Guardian* 11/03/1939, 5).

Newchurch Parish Church, Culcheth, Warrington. (n.d.) The central window, Christ's birth, Mary and Child; the two side windows, shepherds. (Figure 19). (Signed window by J T Alexander).



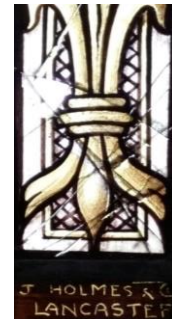
St Andrew's, Cleveleys



Christ Church, Silloth



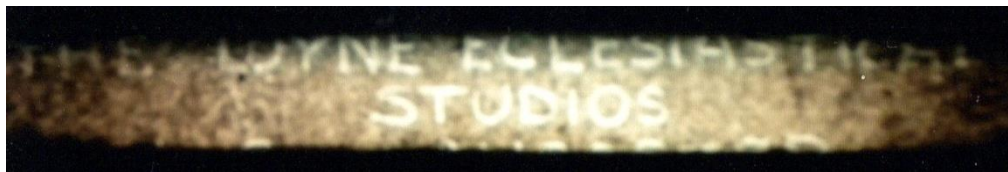
St Peter's Church, Darwen



South Stainmore, St Stephen



Carnforth Congregational Church, War Memorial Window



"Loyne Ecclesiastical Studios" signature at the base of the window,
Holy Trinity, Morecambe

Fig. 1 Examples of Holmes' window signatures

There are also distinctive stylistic elements in the designs. These include the use of plain glass in diamond-shaped leads that allow natural light into the church interior. Compositions of two, three or more lights were treated in a similar way. Larger windows were embellished with supports of various kinds which included Romanesque pillars supporting architectural stands and floriated console bracket bases, and these are found on both pictorial windows and those with diamond-lead clear glass. Figure 2 is an architectural base and Figures 3, 4 and 5 are floriated console bracket bases. Note the diamond-shaped clear glass occurring in many upper and lower portions of these windows.



Fig. 2 Christ Church, Silloth



Fig.3 St Peter, Darwen

The design can be abstract or figurative. Many incorporate narratives drawn from the Bible (Figures 6, 7, 11–15, 19 & 20), history or literature, while others represent saints (Figure 9) or patrons

(Figure 8) or they use symbolic motifs, in particular armorials. Windows within a building may be thematic, including landscapes, flowers or seascapes. The firm's smaller windows, like those at Carnforth, are pictorial and tell a contemporary story recalling the suffering and loss created by war, the shield of St George bearing the names of the lost and the nurse tending to the wounded soldier (Figure 8).



Fig. 4 Holy Trinity, Morecambe



Fig. 5 St John, Waberthwaite, Cumbria



Figures 6 & 7 Pictorial Biblical scenes, Chancel Lady Chapel, St Andrew's, Cleveleys



Fig. 8 Carnforth Congregational



Fig. 9 St Thomas, Preston



Fig. 10 St Peter, Darwen

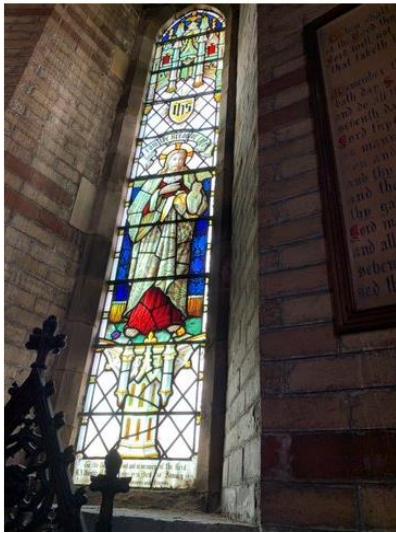


Fig. 11 Left lancet



Fig. 12 The apse
Christ Church, Silloth

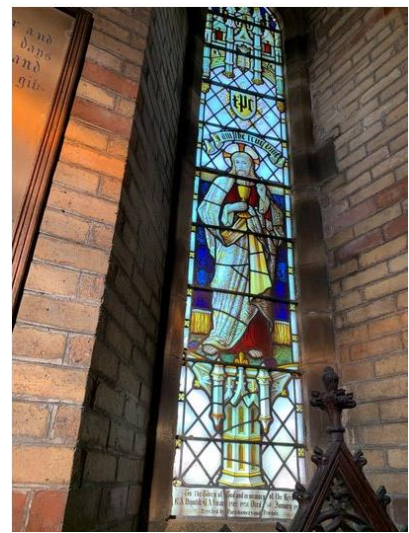


Fig. 13 Right lancet

St Peter's Church at Darwen depicts a biblical scene of the Sower and the Reaper, metaphors for the moral message, "give and it will be given to you" (Figure 10). A further window with a pictorial biblical scene of "Feed my sheep" depicts the figure of Christ and his lambs at South Stainmore Chapel (Figure 14). The "Feed my Sheep" theme is also seen at Holy Trinity Morecambe (Figure 15). This is also seen in a different representation in a single window and in a much earlier figurative style in the East window of St John's Church, Waberthwaite, Cumbria (Figure 16). Some of the artistry is very detailed (Figure 18).



Fig. 14 South Stainmore
Chapel, Brough



Fig. 15 Holy Trinity,
Morecambe



Fig. 16 St John,
Waberthwaite



Fig. 17 The date of a window is not always noted but the subject of the memorial can be a guide. South Stainmore Chapel, Brough



Fig. 18 St Peter, Darwen, details



Fig. 19 Newchurch Parish Church, Culcheth



Fig. 20 Silverdale Wesleyan Church

Endnotes

1. Bell's premises on 32 Parliament Street still exist. It was originally designed in 1863 by E G Paley for Richard Fawcett in a distinctive Venetian Gothic style (Hartwell & Pevsner 2009, 395; Brandwood 2012, 220). By 1881 Bell had taken over the site (Price 1989).
2. John Thomas Alexander was born on 15 April 1887, the son of James (a clog maker) and Alice Cecilia (née Wheeldon) of Rangemore, Staffordshire. John Thomas was 3 years old when they lived at 1 Back Sulyard Street (1891 Population Census) They had moved to 51 Sterling Road by 1901 and in 1911 lived at 'Rose Lea' on Bowerham Road where he is described as a stained-glass painter (artist). He married Florence Shenton in 1913. He is found in the 1939 National Register with Florence and his niece Lillian living at 136 Morecambe Road in Scale Hall, as a stained-glass artist. He died in 1957 aged 70. He principally worked for Shrigley & Hunt as a director and art advisor, having begun as an apprentice around 1904, then becoming foreman glass painter in the interwar years and finally a director after 1945 (Waters 2003, 47, 56, 57). His work for Holmes must have been an occasional sub-commission that did not conflict with Shrigley & Hunt's work.
3. The Holmes stained-glass studio was continually expanding as shown by three plans submitted to the Borough Surveyor (Lancashire Archives MBLA 5167). Two, for store sheds, were approved for the studio at Fenton Street and a third was a store shed at his residence, 22 St Paul's Road Scotforth. All were approved. A copy of the second plan (3225) was drawn on a 'cartoon' (a preliminary sketch) for a memorial (illustrated below) and this is the only known survival of a primary working document from the studio. The first plan was dated 13 January 1910 and was submitted by the Lancaster builder Robert Thompson; it was approved on the 14th of the same month (Plan No. 2771). A second plan was submitted and approved on 16 October 1922 (plan 3225). The last of the three was submitted on 11 March 1928 and approved on 19 March.



The reverse of Plan 3225, Lancashire Archives MBLA 5167

Acknowledgments

I acknowledge gratefully the assistance I have received from Margaret Edwards of Manchester, Len Shorrock of Scotforth, Gordon Clark, those who have allowed me access to their churches and those who have kindly provided photographs and information.

Picture credits

Christ Church, Silloth, Cumbria – Rev. Bryan Rothwell. Newchurch Parish Church, Culcheth, Warrington – Alan Wright. St Andrew's, Cleveleys, Lancashire – Ms Joanne Snape (Churchwarden). St John, Waberthwaite, Cumbria – Margaret Edwards. Silverdale Methodist Church – Rev. Emma Holroyd. South

Stainforth, St Stephen – Judy Dobson and her husband . Other photographs were taken from the author's photographic collection.

Author profile

Colin Stansfield was born in Manchester and is a resident Freeman in Lancaster. He is a retired civil servant. His interest is mainly in the architects working in North-West England between 1751 and 1951. He is a life member (and one of the founders) of the 20th Century Society. Email: colinstansfield970@gmail.com

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