



# THE YORK GLAZIERS TRUST

Over 50 Years of Excellence in Stained Glass Craft and Conservation

## **The Conservation of South-Nave Aisle Window s34 A Report for Chapter and FAC**

### INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT: WHY s34 NOW?

Problems in accessing safely south-west quire clerestory window S5 has diverted attention to another, more easily accessible window of comparable size, in order to maintain the 2020 momentum of the Twenty-Year Stained-Glass Conservation Plan. There are 3 aisle-level windows on the south side of the nave that currently have no environmental protective glazing (see fig 1). One of these (s32, the de Mauley window), contains a high proportion of glass of 1906, following its heavy restoration by the firm of Burlison and Grylls. Windows s34 and s35, at the west end of the south nave aisle, in contrast, contain a large quantity of medieval glass and suffer from the usual range of deterioration phenomena, indicating that conservation and the provision of environmental protective glazing (EPG) are highly desirable.

The conservation of these windows had been planned for the year commencing January 2025. However, the possibility of protracted delays in accessing window S5, makes one of these more accessible low-level windows a candidate for earlier conservation. A condition survey of the 2 windows undertaken immediately prior to the Coronavirus lock-down and reported to Alex McCallion on 6 March, revealed window s34 to be in more urgent need of conservation and protection.

### HISTORY AND CONTENT OF THE WINDOW

The window (Fig. 2) contains an amalgam of glass of different dates and origins, and some of the panels can only be described as composites for reasons that will become

clearer below.<sup>1</sup> The most authentic scenes are those in the top row (panels 5a-5c) depicting St Edmund, St William (with later head) crossing Ouse bridge (the Ouse bridge miracle) and St Edward the Confessor and the Pilgrim (who has a 15<sup>th</sup>-century head). The figure of St Margaret (2a) also has a later head. The coats of arms in the bottom panels commemorate Minster surveyor Sir Bernard Feilden (d.2008), the Pilgrim Trust and architectural historian Eric Gee (d.1989), all by Dennis King & Sons of Norwich.

This window perfectly exemplifies the complex history of stained-glass preservation and restoration in York Minster. Of the glass described c.1690 by antiquary James Torre,<sup>2</sup> very little seems to have survived the nave fire of 1840, which started nearby in the south-west tower. In the fire's aftermath three large figures of standing saints of c.1340, St Stephen, St Christopher and St Lawrence, removed from the Lady Chapel after the 1829 fire in the quire, were placed in s34, where they fitted very well and remained until April 1941, when they were removed to safety.<sup>3</sup> After the war, these figures were relocated to the north quire aisle (window n4)<sup>4</sup> although recent research suggests that they may actually have originated in windows at the north-west end of the nave aisle, matching, as they do, the style and design of Archbishop Melton's west window of 1339.<sup>5</sup>

The explanation of the window's current state can be found in the Friends' Annual Reports of 1949 and 1951.<sup>6</sup> In the post-war restoration of window s30, Dean Eric Milner-White (1941-63) took the decision to extract six panels from the window and to use them to create a new window in the then empty s34. There can be no doubt that window s30 contained panels that did not belong there, as its original 'band window' format, with rows of figures under canopies alternating with rows of lighter grisaille, had been disrupted by at least the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> However, which panels belonged in s30 and which panels were alien to it, was far from clear, as Milner-White acknowledged: 'It is impossible to say with certainty which six were

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<sup>1</sup> Listed in S. Brown, *'Our Magnificent Fabrick': An Architectural History of York Minster c. 1220-1500* (Swindon 2003), 289.

<sup>2</sup> James Torre, Minster Library and Archive Ms L1/7, f.24r.

<sup>3</sup> F. Harrison, *The Painted Glass of York* (London 1927), 28.

<sup>4</sup> *Friends of York Minster Annual Report* (afterwards FYMAR) 30 (1958), 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> D. O'Connor & J. Haselock, 'The Stained and Painted Glass' in G. Aylmer and R. Cant (eds.), *A History of York Minster* (Oxford 1977), 383-5.

<sup>6</sup> FYMAR 21 (1949), 31-33; FYMAR 23 (1951), 31-33.

<sup>7</sup> Torre *op. cit.* f.22v.

natives and which colonists'.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, the lack of any rigorous research at the time, coupled with the Dean's poor grasp of early 14<sup>th</sup>-century style meant that at least three of the panels moved to s34 (notably the figures of St Edmund and St Edward the Confessor as well as the Ouse bridge miracle scene) probably belonged in s30 or one of the other windows at the east end of the aisle. For example, it has been suggested that s30 may have been given by Dean William Hambleton (1296-1307), making the Ouse bridge miracle scene a very fitting subject for a window donated by Dean William and overlooking the nave shrine of his name saint.<sup>9</sup>

Panels in both s30 and s34 were then subjected to the sort of reorganisation and restoration that typifies so many of Dean Milner-White's post-war interventions. In order to 'create' s34, the Dean moved six figurative panels from s30, while the canopies were constructed from fragments derived from the 'glass bank', to which were added pieces removed from the Great East Window, then also undergoing restoration, and from the heavily restored Mauley window (s32). These last fragments had been recovered from the restorers in 1931 and had first been placed by clerk of works Jesse Green in the east window of the Zouche Chapel. Those pieces placed in row 1 by Milner-White (which included a panel donated by collector/dealer Roy Grosvenor Thomas) were subsequently removed in the 1970s and substituted for the commemorative armorials mentioned above.

#### CONDITION OF THE GLASS

- The window now consists of 60% medieval stained glass (of the 14<sup>th</sup> to 17<sup>th</sup> century, with numerous modern insertions) and 40% modern plain glazing.
- The glass has no external protection.
- The medieval glass displays high level of glass corrosion, particularly in the figurative panels (rows 2 and 5: Fig. 3)
- In places, areas of glass are very thin, and several holes have appeared as a result of this glass corrosion (Fig. 4)
- Corrosion crusts on the exterior are darkening the window (Fig. 5)
- Modern stop gaps are distracting from appreciation of the medieval surrounding.

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<sup>8</sup> *FYMAR* 21 (1949), 31.

<sup>9</sup> Suggestion first made by the late T. W. French in unpublished notes compiled for the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.

- Numerous plates are visible on heads and shields, some of which are cracked, meaning that they will be admitting moisture and dirt into the plated 'package'. (Fig. 6)
- The lead matrix is heavy, but is in reasonable condition, although, there is some evidence of fractures in lead calmes and lead flanges peeling away in places. (Fig. 7)
- There is a slight buckling of some panels.
- The medieval paint is in reasonable condition; only a small amount of paint loss was noticed.
- There is no condensation tray and no lead sill, meaning that any moisture running off the glass is not conducted outside and has the potential to damage stone, as well as glass.
- The window is generally very dirty; dirt layers are moisture-retentive, exacerbating corrosion and paint loss.

#### PROPOSED CONSERVATION TREATMENT

The window will be conserved along lines already tried, tested and approved in connection with the recent conservation of the unprotected north nave aisle windows (n25, n26, n27). All main lights panels will be removed to the studio for conservation. The tracery lights, containing modern quarries, will remain in place and be cleaned in situ. Following conservation and repair, the glass will be reinstalled with the benefit of internally ventilated environmental protective glazing (EPG), designed as per the approved (and environmentally tested) system designed for the north nave aisle.

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*22 April 2020*

FIGURE 1

PLAN OF THE WINDOWS OF YORK MINSTER  
(CVMA numbering system)

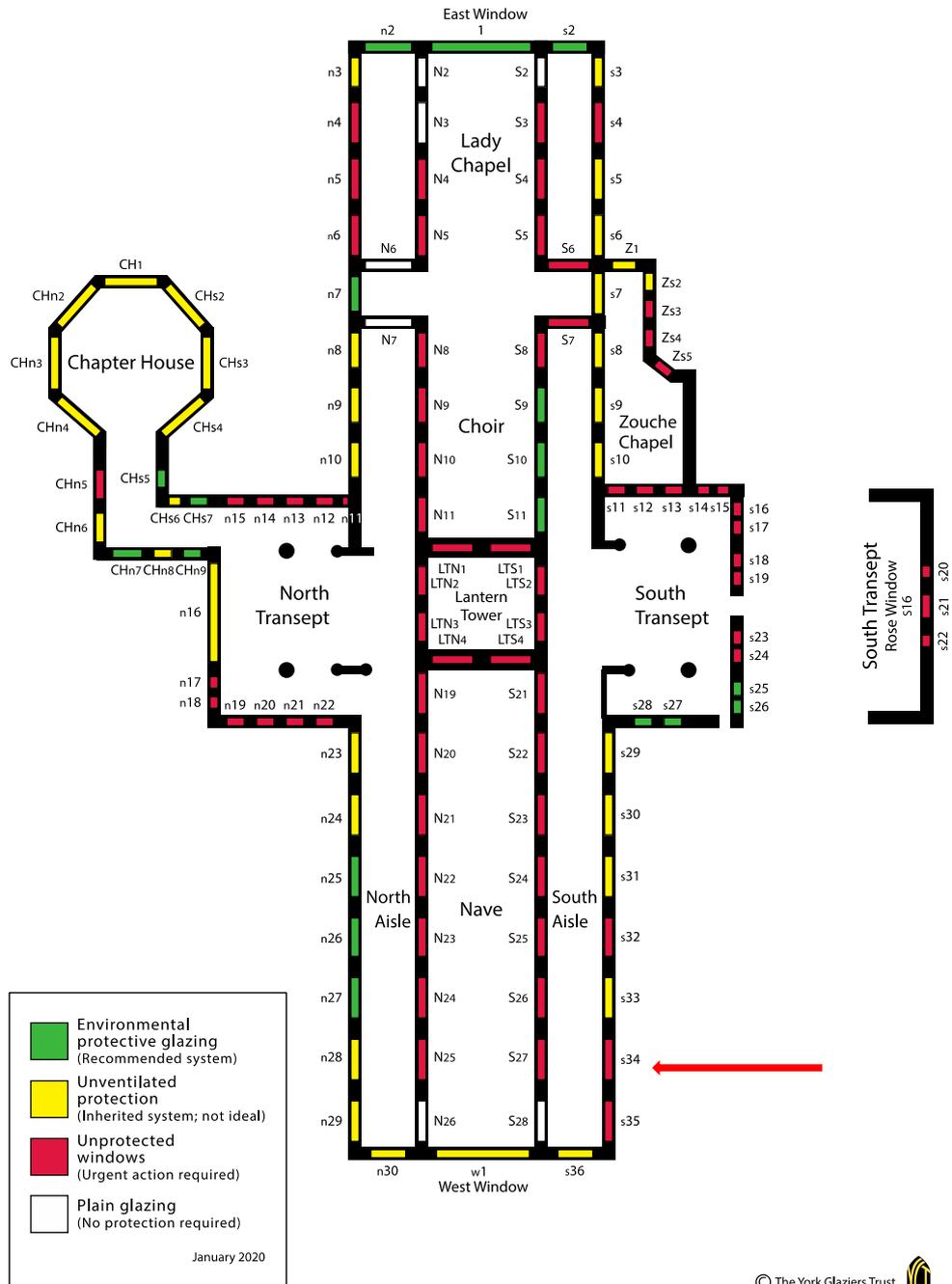


FIGURE 2

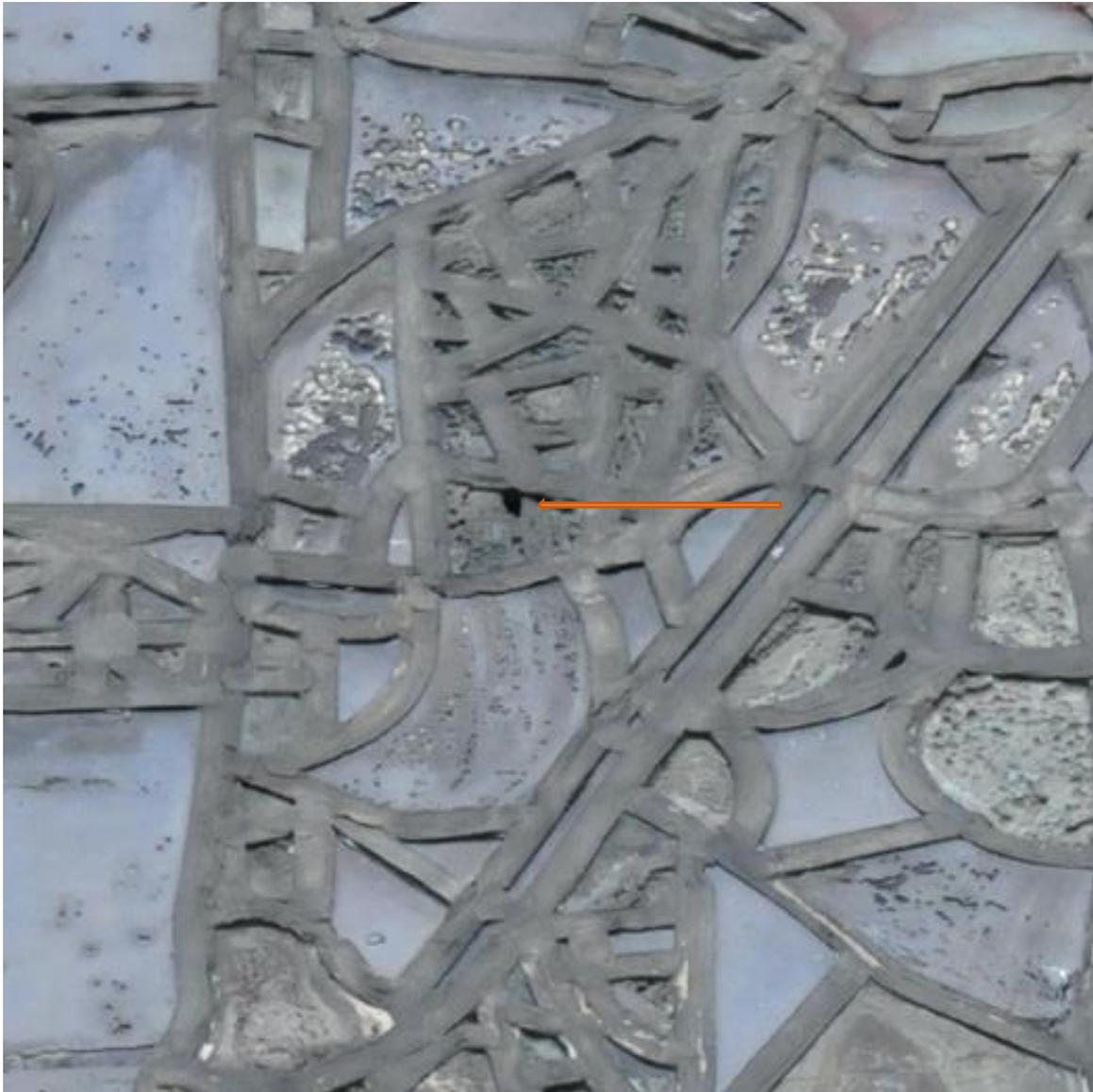


FIGURE 3



Heavy glass corrosion

FIGURE 4



Panel 2a, with glass corrosion and hole

FIGURE 5



Corrosion crust darkening medieval glass in 5a

FIGURE 6



External plates: some damaged and admitting dirt and moisture

FIGURE 7



Torn lead calmes