

This month we are going to look at two windows in the South aisle of St Mary's Church, Dedham. Towards the Eastern end a three panel window shows "The Ascension" of Christ. This window is attributed to J. Powell and sons in 1848. The Powells ran the Whitefriars glassworks in London for five generations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

They brought many innovations to both the production and colouring of stained glass and were probably the most prolific makers of stained glass in England during this period. There are very many examples of their windows throughout Churches in the UK.

In the centre panel a text ribbon extending above and below the figure of Christ reads "I ASCEND UNTO MY FATHER AND YOUR FATHER AND TO MY GOD AND YOUR GOD".

In the middle the figure of Jesus rises up into the clouds with his arms raised in blessing. In the Bible, the Ascension is recorded in Mark 16:19-20, Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-11. It is worth looking at the wonderful painting of the Ascension by John Constable, which we are fortunate to have, hanging over what was the old South door.

In the left hand panel we see inscribed IHS. These letters are very often seen in association with images of Jesus but there is some controversy about their origin and meaning. If they originate from the Greek tradition then they simply translate as JES, which is, of course, an abbreviation: the first three letters of Jesus. However if they arise from the Roman tradition then they may stand for the Latin "In Hoc Signo" (vinces), "by this sign" (you will overcome). The sign in question being the sign of the cross. Contemporary sources tell us that, the night before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312 AD, Constantine had a vision of the cross and told his soldiers to paint this on their shields. Constantine won the battle. As a result he became the Emperor of the Western Roman Empire and converted to Christianity stopping his predecessor Diocletian's vicious persecution of Christians.

In the Right hand panel we see the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha and Omega, again a commonly seen image in Christianity. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." (Revelations 1:8).

Towards the Western end of the South aisle is another three panel window in a similar style which is also probably by J. Powell and Sons.

The central panel depicts Jesus as “The Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18) with a shepherd’s crook and a sheep carried round his shoulders. The text ribbon reads: “The Son of man is come to save that which was lost”. At the top of the window in the tracery we see “Alpha and Omega” again.

The side panels show four winged creatures. In the Bible in the Book of Revelation we read of the vision of four winged creatures, a lion, an ox, a man and an eagle at the foot of God’s throne. Over time these became interpreted as representing the four Gospel Writers.

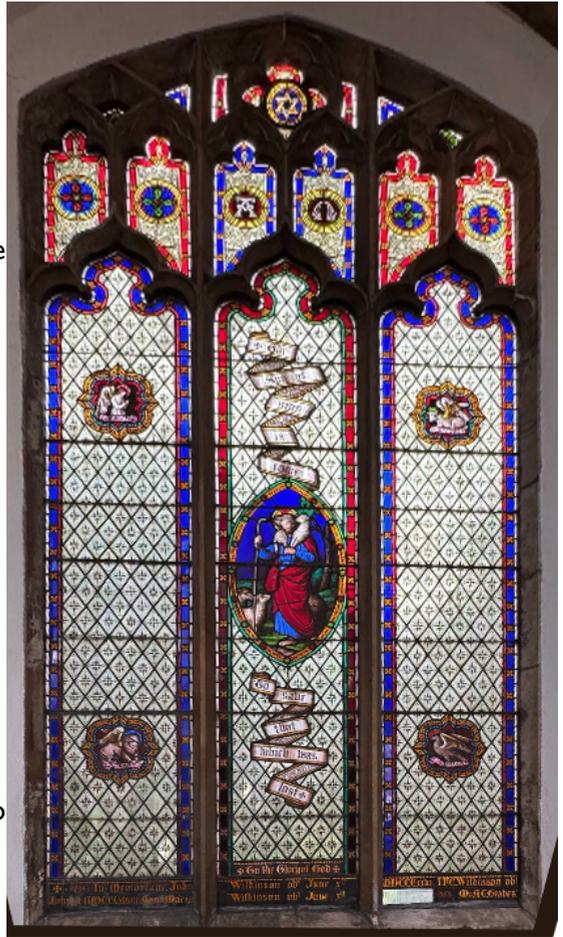
The winged lion stands for St Mark as his gospel emphasises the royal dignity of Christ.

St Luke is suggested by the ox, a sacrificial animal, as his Gospel stresses the sacrificial nature of Christ’s ministry.

The winged man, or angel, came to represent St Matthew as his Gospel opens with the human antecedents of Jesus.

The winged eagle, the creature which flies closest to Heaven, symbolises St John because of his visions and heavenly opening of his Gospel.

These four symbols are known as the Tetramorph and are commonly seen in Christian manuscripts and church edifices.



St Mark



St Luke



St Matthew



St John

*Adrian Beckingsale*