

Following on from last month's article on Passiontide and the Road to Calvary we are going to move on to look at depictions of Jesus' Crucifixion, in our local churches. Although crosses in Churches are universal, depictions of the Crucifixion itself are much less frequently seen in Anglican Churches.



Detail from the Faith, Hope and Charity window in Dedham Church

In St. Mary's Church Dedham, the only one to be found, is in a window at the west end of the south aisle, which shows, "Caritas" (Charity), "Fides" (Faith) and "Spes" (Hope). The central figure 'Faith' is holding a small Crucifix. To find larger and more detailed depictions of the Crucifixion, we have to leave Dedham Church.

The charming little Churches of St Mary in Wix and St. Leonard and St. Mary in Beaumont cum Moze, two of our nine associated churches, both have stained-glass windows showing the Crucifixion.

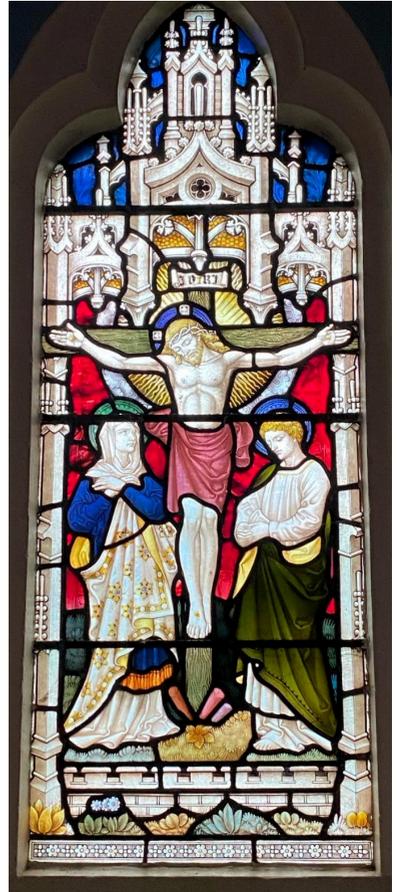
In Wix there are only three panels of stained glass which are situated behind the altar. Seven had been intended but insufficient funds were raised when a major restoration was undertaken in the late 19th century. In the central panel, Christ

hangs on the cross and standing at either side are Mary, his mother, and St. John.

Likewise, behind the altar in Beaumont cum Moze, another window shows the Crucifixion in the central panel. In this a soldier in armour kneels before Jesus possibly representing the moment when the Roman centurion, experiencing the darkness and the earthquake which accompanied Jesus' Crucifixion and death, looks up in awe and realises "Surely He was the Son of God" (Matthew 27: 54).

We are also fortunate to have nearby, the lovely sister church of St. Mary's Ardleigh, which has not a stained-glass window but a mural, depicting the Crucifixion. Here his mother, Mary, and Mary Magdalene, beautifully robed, stand on either side. This striking mural looks down, from above the arched entrance to the nave.

These representations show above Jesus' head the letters INRI, in Latin 'Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum', meaning "Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews," which Pontius Pilate had deliberately placed there. (John 19: 19 – 22)



Wix Crucifixion window



Beaumont cum Moze window behind the Altar

Perhaps an acknowledgement that he realised that Jesus really was the new King of the Jews, though failing to realise that Jesus would, through His death and resurrection, become King of all Peoples.

It is very hard to comprehend, let alone convey, in stained glass or paint the suffering of someone undergoing the dreadful death by Crucifixion.

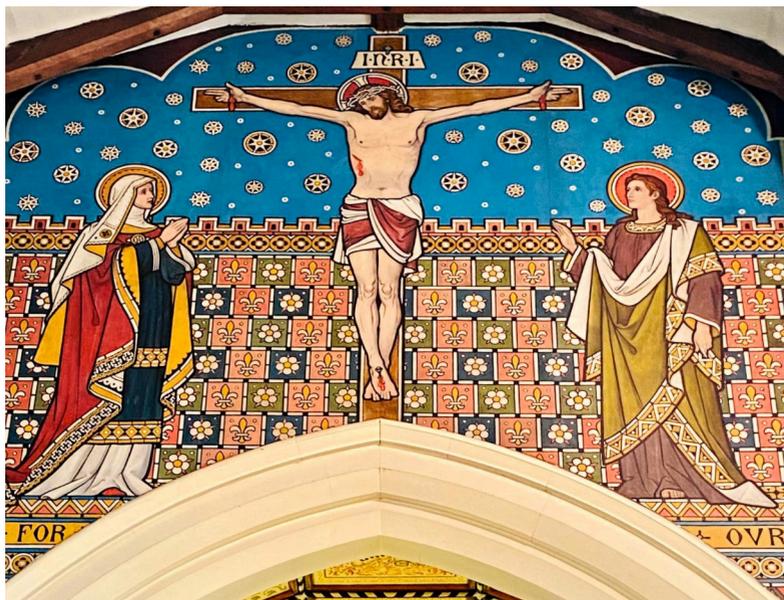
Church depictions often offer a rather sanitised version with beautifully dressed Saints standing on either side of a very “clean” looking Jesus, as exemplified in the Ardleigh mural.

We hear in St. John’s gospel (19:28-30) that Jesus’ lips were moistened with “wine vinegar” because He was thirsty, which might seem like further torture, but was in fact a small act of kindness amidst the cruelty. “Sour wine” (rather than what we think of today as vinegar) was in biblical times taken as a refreshing drink.

In his agony Jesus called out to his Father, “ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me ? “ (Matthew 27:46) but did not spare himself this cruel death. The Bible tells us that it was for us he hung and suffered there.

Next month we shall return to Dedham Church for the depiction of the joyous realisation of Jesus’ triumphant resurrection.

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St. Mary’s Ardleigh Crucifixion mural