

North Mayo Heritage Centre Mayo Heritage Newsletter

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Feature article

Stained Glass



The exceptionally detailed stained glass windows of
St. Brendan's Cathedral, Loughrea
(Image from connachttribune.ie)

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STAINED GLASS

Ireland has a rich legacy of stained glass. Fine examples of the art can be found in public and private buildings across the country, but primarily in our churches. If you travelled around the regions, you would begin to see certain trends.

Windows created at The Clarke Stained Glass Studios, who were based in Dublin from 1893 to 1972, and at Earley & Company, who operated in Dublin from 1864 to 1972, are found mainly in Catholic churches.

By contrast, the Church of Ireland largely chose An Túr Gloine (The Tower of Glass), established in Dublin from 1903 until 1944, and the Clokey Stained Glass Studio of Belfast, which operated c.1904 to 1972, with the production of the latter studio mostly found in Ulster.

In the earlier decades of the 20th century most orders for stained glass were for a single window (often a memorial), whereas in the second half of the century, particularly post-Vatican II, architects commissioned stained glass for an entire church.

War and conflict brought unexpected work for stained glass artists. Many Protestant churches contain impressive stained glass windows erected in memory of young men who never returned from the Great War.

In more recent times the Troubles took their toll and while several churches lost fine windows in bombings, there are occurrences of entirely rebuilt churches enhanced with complete schemes of stained glass.

Right: "The Last Judgement" window in St. Patrick's Church in Newport
(image from buildingsofireland.ie)

A few individual buildings stand out for particularly distinguished collections of stained glass: St Brendan's Cathedral in Loughrea, Co. Galway is filled with impressive windows by An Túr Gloine artists spanning half a century; Galway Cathedral has a remarkable collection of stained glass from the second half of the 20th century, in particular showcasing the work of Patrick Pollen.

In Cork, the Honan Chapel in the grounds of University College Cork (UCC), has some striking works by Harry Clarke, such as his depiction of St. Gobnait in her role as patron saint of beekeeping. Many rural parishes off the beaten track hold unexpected gems, such as the little church at Bridge-A-Chrinn in north Louth which has an astonishing two-panel window made by Michael Healy in 1923. Within the county of Mayo there are more exceptional examples of Harry Clarke's work.

He was an artist of high technical and imaginative ability and undoubtedly Ireland's greatest stained glass artist. Hence, Canon MacDonald of Newport, Dean d'Alton and Monsignor Thomas Shannon of Ballinrobe were among the parish priests who commissioned his windows for their churches.

In 1925 to 1926 he designed and executed "The Adoration of the Magi" window in Kilmaine. Between 1921 and 1931 he created the windows for the churches in Ballinrobe, Newport and Roundfort. Ballindine, Claremorris, Cong and Knock boast windows created and designed by the Clarke Studios under his supervision during the 1920s. "The Last Judgement" window in St. Patrick's Church in Newport is the last window created by him (below).

A large amount of stained glass windows by Irish artists was commissioned for overseas locations too.



Stained glass window in St. Patrick's Church, Lahardane entitled 'Titanic Rescue'. Designed by Michael Coleman and constructed by Art Glass in Derry.
(Image Kenneth Noone)

A crematorium chapel near Wellington, New Zealand is home to six superb windows by Geddes, Healy and Hubert McGoldrick dating from 1914 to 1939. Irish missionaries commissioned windows for churches in India, Pakistan, Philippines and Nigeria. Two small ones were also made in Abbey Stained Glass Studios, Dublin in the 1970s by George W. Walsh for the Ashkenazi Synagogue in Harare, Zimbabwe.

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