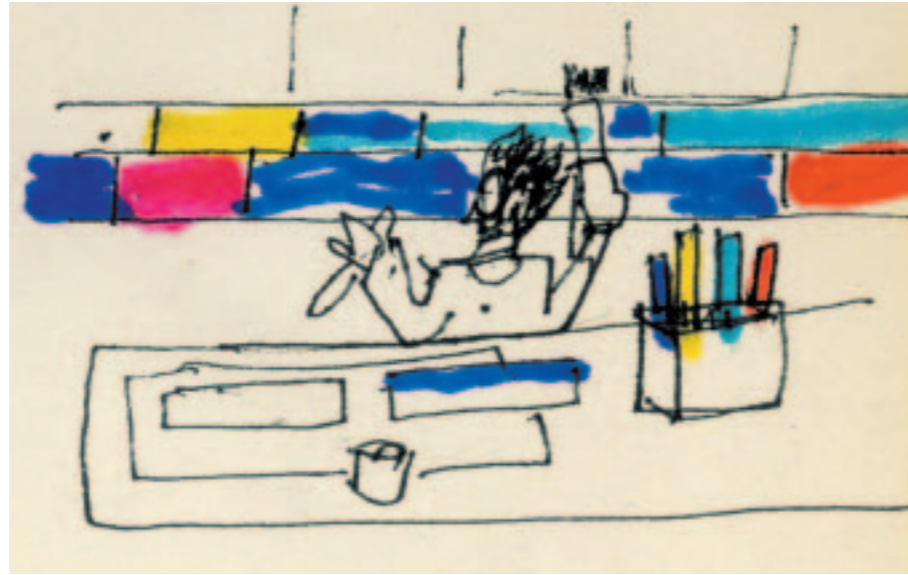


Ros shares some thoughts



Over the months of putting this book together I have spent many hours with Ros deepening a friendship that began nearly thirty years ago. We have discussed, particularly, the making of the Chester window, but also her thoughts, feelings and insights on a whole spectrum of subjects. Living with Parkinson's disease has of course, been one of them.

Although not particularly 'religious' Ros does admit to feeling a kinship with the idea of the Biblical Creation, particularly the aspect that deals with Man's responsibility in his stewardship of the Earth and his relationships with his fellow Man. She says: "Man is the only creature that can now look after the earth and if we don't do this properly then we are not fulfilling our part." On re-reading Genesis, she identified strongly with the idea of the Spirit – the Spirit of God in Genesis that hovers over the waters of oblivion. It becomes the Spirit of the New Testament, available to help every man, woman and child whose soul is 'opened' to it.

"As a child I have vivid memories of pictures on the wall of my bedroom. One was of a farmyard and the other of a circus scene, both by the same artist. In both scenes the figures – animals, farmers and circus people – were portrayed in strong colours against a black background. I am sure this contributed in some

way or other to my interest in stained glass and particularly to my love of using strong colours."

"What is so lovely about stained glass is that you make things – you don't put them together. I know it looks like putting pieces of glass together and holding the result up to the light, but actually during the making period each piece of glass becomes a point of focus. Then my own 'focus' – the imagination, or the creative spirit I suppose – adds something to it, perhaps another piece of glass alongside it or 'plated' to it and 'something new' emerges. I love not being in total control!"

"I felt this particularly strongly whilst making the Creation window..... this process of being an agent in the creation of something genuinely new and needed. Painton reminded me of the remark by the artist Paul Klee (whom we both admire greatly) that an artist is, in fact, 'a tool of the universe'."

Right from the beginning of my interest in stained glass I have been guided by the example and writings of Christopher Whall. He was born around 1850 and died in 1924. Through the Art Workers' Guild he met many of the leading lights in the Arts and Crafts movement in which William Morris played such an important part. What attracted me most about Christopher Whall's approach to making stained glass windows was its profound common sense and human-ness, if I might call it that. He had a 'family' like mine where relations, friends, hangers-on and apprentices all seemed to mill around on an equal footing –

and there were animals, birds in cages about the house. Yet making the windows was the number one serious business – and making them to the best of one's ability was absolutely vital. He was a great believer in perfection and would do all the necessary research in connection with a window before starting.

Unlike many of his Victorian colleagues, Whall believed that the glazier should be intimately involved with every stage of a stained glass window's production, from design through to final leading. Incidentally, I was sad that Patrick had to do the leading of the Chester window, but in the circumstances and under the time pressure we had no alternative. But Patrick and I had both been apprentices in the same firm – Joseph Bell & Son, where we met – and he had been 'in' on the window since its inception, so we were at least both on the same wavelength.

Whall's book "Stained Glass Work" has been my bible. I think it was the advice he gave on how to clean a 'badger brush' that first drew me to him, namely to do so "in the manner of an Italian waiter mixing hot chocolate"! Here indeed was a man after my own heart! He was full of sensible practical advice and particularly keen that his apprentices should develop their intuition. He once said something like: "if you think you want to use a particular colour – or piece of glass – do so, regardless of what others might think, or the prevailing 'taste' of the day." He coupled this with encouraging people to think in abstract terms and not just in terms of the pre-conceived composition – to allow whatever element that might appear by chance and 'seemed right' to prevail by modifying the original idea. Above all, he believed in letting the glass lead the glazier, rather than the reverse of imposing one's will onto the glass: if a piece of 'streaky' suggests a shape then work around that shape until it fits into your intended composition.

As an apprentice I worked in a stained glass studio – Joseph Bell & Son – where the proprietor, Geoffrey Robinson, had studied with a man with a direct link back to Christopher Whall. Very little was actually taught, virtually everything was imparted in silence by just working together at creating windows. It was a beautiful purpose-built studio at the top of the Bristol Guild, but freezing in winter and boiling in summer, with a wide and tall north-facing window – ideal for viewing one's work as it emerged. In these somewhat Dickensian surroundings that never saw the cleaner (glass seems to benefit from not being cleaned)

O how! Nay do but stand
Where you can lift your hand
Skywards: rich, rich it laps
Round the four finger-gaps.
Yet such a sapphire-shot
Charged, steeped sky will not
Stain light. Yea, mark you this:
It does no prejudice.
The glass-blue days are those
When every colour glows,
Each shape and shadow shows.
Blue be it: this blue heaven
The seven or seven times seven
Hued sunbeam will transmit
Perfect, not alter it.

"Mary Mother of Divine grace,
compared to the Air we breathe"
Gerald Manley Hopkins

we were referred to as 'the Loonies in the Loft' by the rest of the Guild! However, one thing I did learn verbally was how to cast a window – charge for everything, down to the last stick of solder, otherwise you would be out of business. When Joseph Bell did close down, Patrick and I were out on the street and we decided to set up shop at our home, where on the ground floor we have fourteen-foot ceilings.

"Since I have had Parkinson's I have spent all these years trying to get the message from the brain to the hand and one of the things that Henry (my brother, who sadly died very suddenly just before the Chester window project started) said was that

with Parkinson's things that are automatic in the body go on of their own accord, like breathing, heart-beating, digestion etc. The act of drawing, by contrast, is subject to the Parkinsonian movement. He pointed out that if I could make the drawing 'automatic' I should be able to create whether I was 'on' or 'off' (in the Parkinson's sense of whether I was being subjected to no movement, as sometimes happens). So I worked on that and carried on drawing even when the rest of me could not move, and that finally got the message through."



"The period of designing and making the Chester window has been a fantastically creative period for me. I think rather than calling the drawing 'automatic' I mean being receptive and 'seeing' things and looking at things without any intellectual analysing and just letting the drawing 'happen' of its own accord, as it were."

"It has not been easy, of course. Just after I obtained the commission to do the window my consultant suggested that

before I get too deeply involved, he get me off the Apomorphine infusions for the Parkinson's and onto a complex regime of drugs that includes Cabergoline. So I had to spend a month or so in hospital whilst they monitored the change over. This now enables me to work up to five hours a day which is a great improvement — and, of course, it is a relief to be off the pump!"

"I have given up so many things in my life now. I hardly ever go out and my life has become so much simpler and more focussed. So much of what went on during the making of this window was simply fantastic! All sorts of things and oddities, such as what I was reading, the people I met, what I heard on the radio or saw on television — a whole spectrum of things just 'happened' and came about exactly when they were needed."

"The window is about the Creation, about Nature, so my own garden is particularly important to me. It helps to weld together the overall feeling of the partnership of the Creation Window with Nature, light, the seasons, trees.... with my own life and the evolving times in which we live. There is a plant in the garden, a quince Japonica, that has red flowers in the spring and in the autumn makes the dullest sludge-coloured apples. But when they are cooked they make a pure pink jelly. I see this as a kind of alchemy, just as stained glass work is a kind of alchemy. Sand and ash are turned into this fantastic substance, glass, that can play with light and colour. Human input then arranges the glass, then Nature takes over and the ever-changing light displays its magic to us. It is a kind of visual pure gold. Before stained glass came of age, almost a thousand years ago, the Byzantine world represented the Divine 'light' that pervaded holy personages by the colour gold that often surrounded them: gold mosaic in the churches, and gold leaf in the icons and paintings. With stained glass, the light can itself symbolise this 'Divine Light' pervading every piece of glass, changing itself with infinite variety as it passes through. In the churches and cathedrals it illuminates stained glass personages, patterns and scenes, while inviting the beholder to share in this element of the Divine ..."

"A particularly magical thing about glass is this way that it changes with light. At different times of the day, or at different times of the year, or in different weather, different pieces of glass in a window come to life..... as if each piece has its own particular time and moment."

"This is the way in which the window is linked to the natural

world — to the Creation as it evolves through our times in what we call evolution. There are some trees outside the Refectory at Chester that cast their shadows onto the Creation Window, moving in the wind, coming and going as the sun moves in and out of the clouds in a kind of Divine Symphony."

"Painton mentioned to me that there was a belief in medieval times that making stained glass involved using jewels. Since light reflected off jewels was believed to have the power to heal people then stained glass windows, that imitated jewels, hinted at this power. I took this idea with a pinch of salt, as do most people, although I believe that gold dust has been used for making certain red glasses for many centuries, although not, we are told, in medieval times. But Painton also suggested that certain stained glass windows seemed to him to have a kind of 'power', even though they were certainly not made from jewels. He suggested that it was not just being in the presence of these windows that brought about the healing but being involved with them that also worked their 'power'. In photographing and researching his own 'Rose Windows' book a kind of miracle was being wrought within him.

In my own life I feel that making this window has brought about amazing changes in me that amount to a kind of healing. As Rodin once said concerning medieval art:-

'In the calm exile of work we first learn patience, which in turn teaches energy, and energy gives us eternal youth made of self-collectedness and enthusiasm. From such vantage we can see and understand life, this delicious life that we denature by the artifices of our enclosed, unaired spirit, surrounded though we are by masterpieces of nature and art.'

Matisse in his advanced years took to collage, often working from his wheel chair — and I feel a kind of empathy with that in doing this Chester window. Matisse's own interest in stained glass came later in his life, and the chapel at Vence in the south of France was designed by him as a kind of 'thank you' to the nuns of the Rosary who looked after him when he was ill.



I feel a strong link with him in this connection. But it is also his interest in collage, in areas of colour and simplicity of line that I share. Painting paper and then cutting it into shape is just like cutting glass — in the designing sense — and much more satisfactory because one can 'see' the window before it is actually made.

I am fond of the poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins, particularly those lines from "Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe":-

'The glass-blue days are those where
every colour glows...'

and, of course:-

'The world is charged with the grandure
of God...'

I hoped I have managed to infuse something of this spirit into the Creation Window.

Parkinson's disease

The following is a letter from Ros's consultant at Weston-super-Mare Hospital, Dr C.E. Bowman, to Mary Baker, then Chief Executive of the Parkinson's Disease Society, dated 5 February 2001. (See page 120 for PDS contact details.)

Dear Mary,

I think I have told you of Ros, one of my Parkinsonian patients. She has had huge problems with Parkinson's disease which with my little bit of knowledge and a great deal of luck and Ros's resolve, we have to an extent overcome. Ros is an internationally renowned stained glass artist and before we made progress with her disease had been unable to work. She is now able to work and competed for and won a commission for a very large window in the Refectory of Chester Cathedral. Indeed she was doing some of the work for this in terms of planning whilst on an extended in-patient re-assessment of her disease towards the end of last year. My understanding is that the window, the glass of which has now been cut, is due to be unveiled in the summer.

I think it would be a fantastic opportunity for the Parkinson's Disease Society to get involved with this in some way. I enclose a photocopy of what the window will be like and should add that it is some 30 feet high in reality and you will see in the fourth panel on the bottom there is a scan of Ros's brain indicating her Parkinson's disease. In the picture you will also see the outline of the Hand of God. I have to say the window will be far more spectacular than this picture can do justice. It has been enormously exciting, and encouraging, for the staff at Weston to be involved with this project and I think that such positivity is something that many other people could benefit from.

My kind regards

CE Bowman, Consultant Physician



Ros's connection with the Parkinson's Disease Society has been through several small incidents.....

1. When I was finally diagnosed I was put into contact with the local Branch Officer who came to see me quite soon. I succeeded in dropping a tray of tea, china, cakes, sugar and milk all over him as we went up the stairs. I have not seen him again!

2. We did once go to a local meeting – just to see. When we got there we were so alarmed by the wiggly wobbly people and the frozen finger food that we swapped identity badges, played a bit longer and then went to the local supermarket – where we saw even more wiggly wobbly people!

3. We became really desperate when I became immobile for up to 8 hours a day. My consultant took me into hospital and started testing a new drug on me. He made me run up and down the hospital ward with increasing doses until I was so sick I stopped. All the punters were very disappointed. My daughter Esther and a friend sprung me later that night.

I thought perhaps there might be some better treatment available and consulted the PDS Head Office. Their geographic knowledge outside London was a little sketchy, but the Salisbury PDS Nurse agreed to come and visit me in Bristol on her way to Cornwall for her summer holidays. She then had a brainwave – wasn't Weston-Super-Mare somewhere near Bristol? We went straight there and discovered 'Parkinson's Paradise' – a full time PDS Nurse (Joan Beer) and other associated workers and a consultant from heaven (CE Bowman) who took me in, sorted me out over the next six years and used my case as the subject of his lecture on the occasion of Mary Baker leaving the Society.

There is still no PDS Nurse in Bristol but I can't speak too highly of the Weston-Super-Mare team, who allowed me to use their unit as a studio for 6 weeks.

I should like to mention the Society's excellent scientific research projects. I myself was involved in a fascinating project in which I was injected with radiation and people in a simulated spaceship watched me – twice.