



All Souls' Anglican Church in the suburb of St Peters, Adelaide, has five Morris & Co stained glass windows, including one called 'War' designed by John Henry Dearle that is unique. The story behind its creation is intriguing and deserving of a wider audience, along with the other window designs by Morris and the building of the church. Here Lindsay Harris discusses the influence of the Byzantine style in Morris's design philosophy.

# A singular artistic vision

From the 1800s until the 1920s, thanks to the patronage of a small number of very wealthy families, Adelaide became Morris & Co's most regular market outside Britain. As a result, the Art Gallery of South Australia lays claim to having the largest known collection of Morris & Co furnishings in any public museum outside the UK.<sup>1</sup> Works by Morris & Co are found across Adelaide and the surrounding area. Amongst the most prominent of these are fourteen stained glass windows, mainly located in various churches. Our knowledge of these windows and their origins owes much to the groundbreaking research of the late Dr Lesley Baker PhD in her doctoral thesis on Morris & Co in Australia.<sup>2</sup> Of the fourteen windows in Adelaide, five are located in All Souls' Anglican Church in the suburb of St Peters. How a suburban church acquired five highly significant examples of Morris & Co stained glass between 1919 and 1939 arose from a combination of war, grief and memory, and the singular artistic vision of its rector Canon Wilfred Murphy and innovative architect Alfred Wells.

In planning All Souls' Church, leading South

Australian architect Wells made a decisive break with prevailing Victorian era architectural styles in Australia. Wells introduced a new Byzantine idiom derived from contemporary developments in Britain and Japan, which was a deliberate rejection of the nineteenth-century Gothic design that had long dominated Australian ecclesiastical architecture. Paradoxically, this adoption of the Byzantine over Gothic was fully in accordance with the ethos and design philosophy of William Morris. In commenting on John Francis Bentley's highly influential design of Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral, built between 1895 and 1903, historian Dr Jacqueline Banerjee observed that Bentley's development of his Byzantine style harmonised with an interest in Byzantine design, craftsmanship and symbolism that was a strong feature of the Arts and Crafts movement. It flowed naturally from the spiritual father of the movement with Ruskin's worship of Venice and its great Byzantine Church of St Mark.<sup>3</sup>

Morris himself espoused the significance of the Byzantine style in the 1882 essay 'The History of Pattern-Designing'. In her 2022 publication

*The Radical Vision of Edward Burne-Jones*, art historian Andrea Wolk Rager records how Morris argued that with the advent of the Byzantine era, art began to free itself from the constraints of political tyranny, the strict bounds of religious doctrine and even the dictates of race. Morris viewed Byzantine art as heralding the Gothic, planting the seeds of a universal artistic phenomenon and an accompanying rise in the ability of the individual to take pleasure in labour.<sup>4</sup> The writings of Morris on Byzantine art appeared in parallel with Burne-Jones' work on the mosaics for the Byzantine-inspired American Episcopal Church of St Paul's Within the Walls in Rome, which was completed between 1881 and 1894. The initiative of Robert Nevin, rector of the American Episcopalian Congregation of St Paul's in Rome, the new church was designed by George Edmund Street, an exponent of the Gothic Revival. The corner stone was laid in 1873 and the use of Byzantine-inspired architecture was intended as a clear statement of Protestant independence in the heart of Roman Catholicism. Street and Burne-Jones had campaigned together against a planned restoration of Venice's St





Further appointments followed around South Australia until in 1907 Murphy came to All Souls'. He found a dilapidated church building where, as he described it in the All Souls' Parish Magazine in February 1903, "Our church building is getting older and frailer, and its seams have a way of opening to let in the weather". In that same issue, he exhorted his parishioners "In imagination I see a new and noble church with lofty roof, fine chancel, wide aisles, good organs, tower and bells". In September 1908 Alfred Wells, a former choirmaster and honorary architect of All Souls', submitted plans to the Parish building committee. This plan was very much in the Byzantine style of Bentley's Westminster Cathedral. Murphy's vision of All Souls' was firmly based upon personal preferences and his standing with the Anglican hierarchy. He appeared to be on excellent terms with Arthur Nutter Thomas, the Bishop of Adelaide, to the extent that he managed to persuade him, contrary to his usual hostile stand on transepts, to approve their incorporation into the design of All Souls' on the practical grounds of their use as a baptistry and week-day chapel.<sup>7</sup>

In October 1908 the Building Committee appointed by the Vestry held a meeting in the Rectory with Wells and unanimously adopted the plan he had produced at an estimated cost of £4,500. From the pen and ink sketch of the new edifice published in the September 1908 issue of the All Souls' Parish magazine, Wells proposed a classic Byzantine design with a campanile, a central dome of high arches and coloured bands of brick and rendering wrapped around the entire building with fenestration set high above the base of the church. In a letter to his parishioners Canon Murphy wrote: "If we erect this new Church according to Mr Wells' plans we shall have a glorious and beautiful edifice, lofty, spacious, suited in every way to our climate and quite different in design to any other Church in the diocese, perhaps I might say in Australia".

Determined fund-raising efforts commenced immediately to build the new church. The aptly named Guild of Perseverance spent years soliciting donations over and above normal contributions through a small, dedicated band of volunteers drawn from the congregation. It seems likely the protracted fund raising resulted in a scaling down of the more ambitious aspects of the original design. In October 1911 Wells submitted a modified version of the proposed church and the hope was expressed that building would commence in 1912, but again difficulties with securing both sufficient funds and loan guarantors delayed the project.

#### Building the new church

Despite these problems and the outbreak of war in 1914, by April 1915 the Annual Vestry meeting had resolved unanimously to commence con-

struction with a revised budget of £3,700. In response to those who wished to defer the project until the war's end, Canon Murphy argued that financial conditions were favourable to borrow money now rather than later, construction costs had fallen and building the church would provide badly needed work for local tradesmen who were experiencing a major downturn in new business.

In July 1915 Wells presented a revised version of the Byzantine-style church and tenders were called. The builders Emmett & Son were selected out of no less than 20 tenders and construction began at once. The final plan for All Souls' saw a tower and spire replace the Campanile, the central high arches revised, and the transepts modified. Wells was entrusted with designing the furniture and fittings, and Emmett & Son were given the contract for the carpentry. Even as the building was taking shape Canon Murphy was launching an appeal to finance a war memorial window where "Friends of the fallen may appreciate this opportunity of commemorating their beloved dead".

By new year 1916 the new furniture had been approved for manufacture with much attention devoted to ensuring that the seating was both comfortable and in keeping with the structure of the Church itself. In furtherance of this concept of an integrated architectural production, Wells also designed the new organ case. By May 1916 construction was completed and on May 31, in the presence of the Governor Sir Henry Galway and a large congregation, Bishop Nutter Thomas formally dedicated the new church. As a corollary to these proceedings Canon Murphy was taken aback to learn that until the Church mortgage was paid off, All Souls' was excluded from representation in the Synod. It would take another decade of difficult fund raising before All Souls' had cleared the debt and was finally consecrated by the Bishop in December 1926, just four months before Canon Murphy stepped down after 20 years as Rector.<sup>8</sup>

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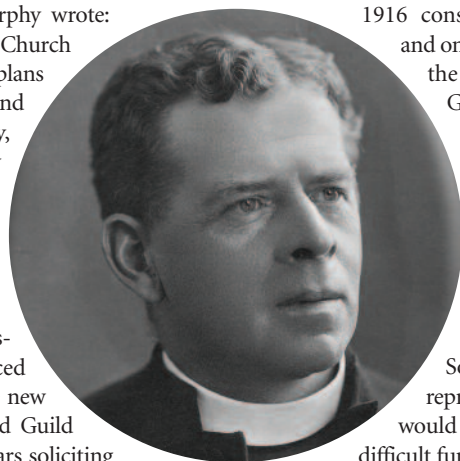
#### Windows sacred and beautiful: war and memory

In the March 1918 issue of the All Souls' Parish Magazine Canon Murphy sagely noted: "When peace has been restored and business again resumes her sway, some of the memorials erected in the offices of great firms will probably be in the way, and their removal will only be a matter of time. The memorials in churches will not be resented by travellers and clients, and will always be carefully maintained..."

Mark's and it was this connection that Rager believes led to Burne-Jones being commissioned in 1881 to decorate the largely bare walls of St Paul's Within the Walls with a series of Byzantine-like mosaics. Between 1881 and his death in 1898, Burne-Jones, after initial technical difficulties in applying the mosaics in accordance with traditional methods, produced a series of stunning designs within the Church beginning with Christ Enthroned in the Heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

#### A new and noble church

The design and building of All Souls' Church in what doyenne of Australian Gothic Brian Andrews referred to as a 'ground-breaking style' is derived from the professional skill of its architect Alfred Wells, and the vision of its presiding minister Canon Wilfred Murphy.<sup>6</sup> Born in Bideford, Devon, Murphy spent his early years on sailing ships, twice rounding Cape Horn. After training as a minister in Canterbury in 1891 he arrived in South Australia, undertaking strenuous pastoral work across the north of the State during a time of drought.







All Souls' has an array of stained glass windows of first rank consisting of a mixture of Morris & Co and the Brisbane manufacturers R S Exton & Co. Of the fourteen identified Morris windows around Adelaide, five are located in All Souls'. The war memorial windows are of special significance, the spiritual and historical associations of which resonate with the broader community and to South Australian identity. Again, the creation of the original stained glass windows within All Souls' owes much to the vision and drive of Canon Murphy. In 1910 Murphy reported back to his flock of an extended family trip to England where he admired the "evening light streaming through the fine stained glass windows" at Seal and the beauty of Kippington Church, both near Sevenoaks, that brought "him perilously close to breaking the Tenth Commandment" in his anxiety to see "something done" at All Souls'.

In December 1915 as Australian casualties were beginning to mount, in the parish magazine Murphy discussed the feasibility of a war memorial window whereby "Friends of the fallen may appreciate this opportunity of commemorating their beloved dead." A fund was opened for donations so that "The names of our heroes will be inserted in the window or on a brass plate beneath it". In the event Murphy's

wish would be fulfilled through the patronage of grieving families mourning fallen relatives. The first two Morris & Co windows were privately ordered in 1917 by parishioners Mrs Suckling and Mrs Bagot. The window 'St Paul' was in memory of Martin Suckling, and was the gift of his wife and children. The second window 'Jonathon' was donated by the Bagot family in memory of Charles Bagot of the 3rd Light Horse who died of wounds suffered at Gallipoli aboard a hospital ship and was buried at sea. As Baker observes, his family did not even have a photograph of a war grave and this window was the only physical memorial of their son.<sup>9</sup> Both windows were adaptations of original 1870s designs by Burne-Jones, the main glass designer for Morris & Co. Their slightly different designs from the original windows reveal that Morris & Co adjusted their designs with their new architectural settings in mind and these two windows were executed as a facing pair on opposite sides of the nave in All Souls'.

Baker's research into the stained glass at All Souls' reveals that both Canon Murphy and the various family donors liaised closely by correspondence and in person with John Henry Dearle, who was a leading designer for Morris & Co, and after Morris's death in 1896, became artistic director of the firm. Murphy had a low

opinion of locally produced stained glass, expressing the view there was "no greater horror in church adornment than cheap and inferior glass".<sup>10</sup>

### The Wendt family and the 'War' window

The next window to be ordered is perhaps the single most important addition to All Souls' stained glass. The 'War' window was a deeply felt tribute by the well-known silversmiths and jewellery family Wendt, for their younger son, 18-year-old Lt Kenneth Wendt, killed on 6 May 1917 at the second battle of Bullecourt. Baker describes how Kenneth's parents, Hermann and Jane, travelled to London in 1916 to see their son and did not return to Adelaide until April 1919. The Wendts visited Morris & Co personally and most likely Dearle suggested to them the design 'War' as the most appropriate for their dedication. Dearle had first designed 'War' for St Bartholomew's, Wilmslow in 1918/19 but the All Souls' version would acquire major differences in its final manufacture.

It is clear from Baker's extensive research into the Morris & Co archives that Canon Murphy had substantial input into the final design of 'War' after the initial commission by the Wendts. It was at Murphy's behest the figure of the central soldier being received into Paradise was





converted from a medieval knight into an Australian soldier. This change was at the instigation and insistence of Murphy, who wrote: "...There is really no reason why we should not hand down to history a correct picture of the military habit of these days, even as the medieval artists put in their pictures the costumes of the Kings, Bishops and Knights of their days".<sup>11</sup>

Dearle wrote to Murphy explaining the imaging of the window noting "You will see that the sketch now embodies a 'khaki' figure". There were also personal references to Kenneth Wendt: to the centre right is the insignia of his unit, the 10th Battalion, which also appears on the uniform's regimental patch and the adjacent slouch hat. In the centre left the badge of St Peter's College, Kenneth's alma mater." There were also other alterations from the original St Bartholomew's version where in the centre lights the white dress of the St Bartholomew's angels were changed into blue and green at All Souls' and the wings from blues to reds. Individual details like the patterning on Christ's white under-robe were also altered for the All Souls' window. Baker observes that the All Souls' version is an excellent example of how originally Morris & Co treated each of its orders until Dearle's death in 1932.<sup>12</sup>

The end result was the creation of a war

Left to right: *War* (1920). Dearle significantly modified his previous design for St Bartholomew's, Wilmslow, to depict a khaki-clad Australian soldier at the insistence of Canon Murphy. The result is a work unique in the output of Morris & Co. *St Paul* (1919), original design by Edward Burne-Jones in 1875 adapted for All Souls' by John Henry Dearle in 1919. *St Michael* (1924), the Archangel St Michael is both the heraldic sign of All Souls' and a warrior figure referencing the two dedicatees of this memorial window who lost their lives on active service (all © Brenton Brockhouse).

memorial window unique in the career of Morris & Co stained glass and in a form not seen anywhere else around the world. The khaki colour was apparently difficult to reproduce in stained glass but Murphy's artistic vision for All Souls' (ironically Canon Murphy was colour blind) ensured its realisation, giving the Church and South Australia a superb and singular representation of the art of stained glass.

### St Michael and 'Peace' windows

With the installation of the Wendt window Murphy gained renewed spirit for another memorial window, which he had been pursuing since early 1918. This window of St Michael the Archangel was dedicated to the memory of two young members of the congregation. Fred Farmer Bassett was the Choirmaster and Sunday School teacher who died of meningitis in London, likely contracted on board his troopship en route to England. John Vivian Gordon was a member of the Sunday school and choir. Gordon was killed in action at Messines on 24 June 1917. A public appeal to pay for this window dragged on until 1922 when Murphy was confident enough to place an order with Morris & Co and it was eventually installed in March 1924.

It seems the first design proposed by Morris & Co was of Christ in the Carpenter's Shop. Although this would have recognised the Sunday School affiliations of the two dedicatees, it would have not connected the window to the warrior figures of the previous two war memorials. In all probability Dearle offered the figure of St Michael as an alternative owing to the Archangel's warrior status and his relationship to All Souls' Church. St Michael is depicted as weighing the souls of men which is the heraldic sign of All Souls'. St Michael was originally designed by Burne-Jones in 1874 for the multi-light west window of Calcutta Cathedral and reappeared in 1893 for the multi-light east window of Albion Congregational Church in Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire. In keeping with the artistic standards of Morris & Co under Dearle the St Michael of All Souls' was altered in several aspects to render it unique to the Adelaide church. The All Souls' window is the only other representation of this version of St Michael and it was presented as a single light, the only occasion this occurred. Three months after the window's dedication Murphy received a letter from Dearle explaining the figures representing the souls were symbols and not to be viewed as realistic. Dearle wrote the window "was much admired by many" who had seen it during production at Merton Abbey, the firm's workshop.<sup>13</sup>

The last Morris & Co window to be installed

at All Souls' was the 1939 'Peace' in memory of Kenneth Wendt's father Herman and placed in the transept chapel opposite the 'War' window. After Hermann's death in 1938 his widow and daughter travelled to England and apparently inspected the window that was under construction at Morris & Co. Both Wendts and window safely arrived in Australia after the declaration of war and the 'Peace' window was unveiled on Christmas Eve by Wendt's grandson. Baker observes the window is virtually the same as the original Dearle design of 1920 for St Bartholomew's using the original colour scheme of the St Bartholomew's prototype without the variations in treatment accorded the two 'War' windows. This lack of inspiration reflected the decline in artistic standards at Morris & Co following Dearle's death. In fact, 'Peace' was the last Morris & Co window placed in Australia as the firm closed its doors in 1940. Nevertheless, in conjunction with 'St Paul', 'Jonathon', 'War' and 'St Michael', All Souls' holds a highly significant collection of stained glass by the world's most famous stained glass manufacturer united in a coherent theme of memory, war and peace.<sup>14</sup>

The stained glass war memorial windows of All Souls' were created for individual families to remember personal loss of loved ones, yet they also serve a much broader purpose of remembrance and reflection for the South Australian community as a whole. In the words of Canon Murphy at the dedication of the 'War' window: "It is the hope and desire of his family that every parent who lost a son or brother or relative at the front will be comforted when he or she looks at this window with its sacred and beautiful suggestiveness of Divine love, of rest after victory, of peace after strife."<sup>15</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Morris & Co Exhibition Catalogue, 21 November 2002-26 March 2003, Menz, C (ed), Art Gallery of South Australia Adelaide, 2002, pp.6-8.
- 2 Baker, Lesley Anne, 'The Development of Decorative Arts in Australia, Morris & Co and Imported Taste 1862-1939', PhD thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, June 2004.
- 3 Banergee, J, *The Victorian Web*, John Francis Bentley's Westminster Cathedral, London, victorianweb.org/art/architecture/bentley [accessed 26 June 2023].
- 4 Rager, Andrea Wolk, *The Radical Vision of Edward Burne-Jones*. Yale University Press, London, 2022, pp.178-79.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Rager, pp.182-86.
- 6 Andrews, Brian, *The Cultural Heritage of the Anglican Diocese of Adelaide Part I Overview*, Report for Anglican Diocese of Adelaide and Heritage South Australia, Dept of Environment Adelaide, 1998, pp.26-40.
- 7 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.283.
- 8 Rowney, D.K, *100 Years at All Souls' 1883-1983*, Lutheran Publishing House Adelaide, 1983.
- 9 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.286.
- 10 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.287.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.293.
- 12 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.294.
- 13 *Ibid.*, Baker, pp.299-300.
- 14 *Ibid.*, Baker, pp.304-307.
- 15 *Ibid.*, Baker, p.292.

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