

CHARLES EAMER KEMPE

SYNOPSIS:

Kempe was educated at Rugby and at Pembroke College, Oxford, and then became the pupil of the young architect, G F Bodley. He then went to Clayton & Bell's where he learned the glass artist's craft. Kempe had wanted to be ordained, but was prevented by an impediment in his speech. He said, 'If I cannot serve in the sanctuary, I can at least beautify it'. He was not an artist himself but set up his own firm and employed others to carry out his ideas not only on windows but also on altar frontals, vestments etc.

C E KEMPE & CO was founded in 1869 and his glass studio became one of the most distinctive and successful of the late Victorian era. Some, but not all of Kempe's windows bear his mark, which takes three different forms: a Wheatsheaf, three wheatsheaves, or a wheatsheaf with a tower imposed. Angels with peacock's feathers in their wings are another common feature of Kempe's work.

All of the windows in St Thomas' Chapel, the Airmen's Chapel, and St Oswald's Chapel are by Kempe, as are one in the sanctuary, one in the south quire aisle and one in the south nave aisle, although the latter two differ from the others. Whilst the others illustrate stories from the New Testament, mainly stories connected with the Nativity of Christ, the remaining two show: in the nave, the Three Archangels and in the quire, the Two Dragon Slayers (St Michael and St George).

Many of Kempe's windows are "signed" with a wheat sheaf mark (part of the Kemp family crest), which takes several different forms. Sometimes there are three sheaves, sometimes just one, and, after Walter Tower became chairman, there is a wheat sheaf with a tower on top of it. Also typical of Kempe windows are the angels' wings that are composed of peacocks' feathers, and robes that are very heavily jewelled.

The three windows in St Thomas' Chapel, the two panels in the sanctuary, the soldier saints window in the south quire aisle and the three archangels window in the south nave aisle all have one or other of the marks, but the windows in the Airmen's Chapel; and St Oswald's Chapel do not.

Edit of his entry in the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Charles Eamer Kempe (1837–1907), artist in stained-glass and church decoration, was born on 29 June 1837 at Ovingdean Hall, Sussex, the fifth son and seventh and last child of Nathaniel Kemp JP, who died when his son was six, and his second wife, Augusta Caroline, the daughter of Sir John Eamer, a former lord mayor of London. Kempe (he added the 'e' in the 1860s.

His mother moved the family to Tunbridge Wells after the death of his father, and it was there that an aunt fostered Charles' artistic talents. He was educated at Rugby under Dr Arnold, and at Pembroke College Oxford.

A severe stammer prevented his taking holy orders, and Kempe determined to devote his Anglo-Catholic fervour to the cause of ecclesiastical art. He gained practical experience and made designs for embroidery and furniture **in the office of the young G.**

F. Bodley, son of the Kemp family physician, and a leading figure in the later phase of the Gothic revival in architecture. [Bodley was responsible for the nave pulpit at Southwell Minster]

After seeing the work of men such as William Morris, Burne Jones and Philip Webb he decided to specialise in stained glass, and was trained in the firm of **Clayton and Bell** (who also have two windows in the Minster). In 1866 he set up his own business in Camden Town for stained-glass and church decoration. Three years later he received his first major commission, to decorate Bodley's new church of St John, Tue Brook, Liverpool.

Kempe engaged the help of artists such as Alfred E. Tombleson, and John Lisle his chief designer and draughtsman. By the late 1890s he had gathered a team of more than 50 skilled craftsmen, and the work which Kempe's produced, whether it was glass, embroideries or church furnishings was always distinctive. The business prospered, and his work graces many cathedrals, including those in Wells, Lichfield, Southwark, Winchester, Durham, Gloucester, Canterbury, and York Minster. Of his many foreign commissions one of the most prestigious was the window ordered in 1877 by Princess Alice, grand-duchess of Hesse and by Rhine, for the royal mausoleum in Darmstadt, in commemoration of the death of her young son.

Over the years the firm produced about 4,000 works of stained glass, the largest of which is in Hereford Cathedral and many of which can be seen in All Saints' Church at Hucknall.

In 1875 Kempe bought an Elizabethan house, Old Place, Lindfield, Sussex, which he greatly enlarged and decorated lavishly with his growing collection of furniture and works of art. Although he is often characterized as retiring and eccentric, he entertained distinguished visitors in style, and studio staff were frequently welcomed to Old Place and treated with considerable generosity.

Never more than competent as a draughtsman himself, Kempe was adept at selecting and training young designers and craftsmen to carry out schemes under his direction. His early work was inspired by English fifteenth-century glass, and he was a pioneer in his appreciation of late medieval styles. By 1880 he was turning to German models, and as business increased (he is believed to have employed as many as a hundred men) production became stereotyped. In 1882 the eighteen-year-old (John) **Ninian Comper was Kempe's pupil** and already anticipated the view of most subsequent critics with his preference for Kempe's early work.

Kempe died, unmarried, at his home, 28 Nottingham Place, London, on 29 April 1907, and was buried in the family vault at Ovingdean.

The firm continued with his nephew, Walter Tower as Chairman and four of Kempe's old colleagues who became directors of a Limited Company. But the weak derivatives of the Kempe formula produced did little to advance Kempe's reputation and the firm finally closed down in 1934.

Yet Kempe's work is still much admired and in 1984 the Kempe Society was founded to further an interest in it. Yet his role in the advancement of late nineteenth-century art and architecture was an important one. His adaptations of late Gothic and northern Renaissance styles were influential and had many admirers. That he had established an alternative path to Pre-Raphaelite styles was recognized by W. Owen Chadwick, who

suggested in *The Victorian Church* (1966) that 'the art of stained glass reached its zenith, not with the innovations of William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones, but in the tractarian artist, Charles Eamer Kempe.

Windows by Kempe in the Minster:

1 Perpendicular style window in South Nave Aisle to the East of the Font, dated 1898. Three wheatsheaves are to be seen on the left of the window and the artist is Alfred E Tombleson, Kempe and Co's chief painter at the period. The window shows the Three Archangels: Gabriel in the left-hand light, Michael in the centre light and Raphael in the right-hand light.

The dedication in the bottom right-hand corner of the glass reads:

To the glory of God and in memory of a beloved grandmother, Emma Sherlock, widow of Colonel Francis Sherlock, KH and of her grandchildren John Henry Gordon, and Elizabeth Katherine Hodgkinson, the wife of Grosvenor Hodgkinson, his sister, this window is dedicated AD 1892 under the last will and testament of Charles Francis Gordon.

2 Window in the South Quire Aisle, dating from 1918. This is a single panel in the right-hand half of the second bay of the aisle, whilst to the left is a single panel filled with common glass. The painted window depicts St Michael the Archangel and St George. It carries a wheatsheaf with a tower, the signature used by the Kempe company after 1910. On the left is seen the Archangel, dressed in armour and carrying a long lance: he is spearing a blue dragon lying at his feet. St George has a shield bearing the lions of England, a large two-handed sword and a banner with the cross of England. He is slaying a green dragon.

In the bottom right-hand corner of the glass is the following dedication:

For a remembrance before God of Henry Basil Strutt Handford, Capt VIIIth Battn Sherwood Foresters, and of Everard Francis Sale Handford, Lieut. VIIIth Battn Sherwood Foresters who were killed in action in France on Oct 14th 1915. "Lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided".

3 Window in the south wall of St Oswald's Chapel (1885). It is a two-light window with different themes in the two panels:

(a) The Presentation in the Temple. In the centre is the altar in the temple with the BVM at the left and Joseph on the right, holding the cage containing the sacrifice for the first-born. Simeon stands behind holding the baby Jesus.

(b) Christ amongst the Doctors. The panel depicts the story of Jesus accidentally left behind in the Temple after the Passover. Jesus reads from the scriptures and the teachers and elders are gathered round him. In the top corner his parents have just returned and are searching for him.

4. Window is in the east wall of St Oswald's Chapel (1880). The single theme is The Adoration of the Shepherds and the two lancets are to be read as a whole. On the left are the shepherds carrying their crooks, the first of the three kneeling in adoration of the Christ-child, with his mother standing behind. Joseph stands alongside.

5. Window in the south wall of the Sanctuary: a two-light window dating from 1898. The single subject is The Holy Women at the Tomb, but it goes across both lights. The three Marys who visited the tomb early on Easter Day are shown, together with the two angels, one at the head and one at the feet of the position where Jesus had lain. The lower part of this window is obscured because the five-seat Sedilia has been fitted across it, presumably after it was installed. It would seem therefore that the Sedilia was

moved to its present position after 1898, but no independent confirmation of this has been found.

6. Window in the east wall of the Airmen's Chapel, installed in 1875. It depicts the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the roundels show (a) Gideon and the Fleece and (b) Moses and the Burning Bush.

The dedication, which is engraved on the glass and runs across both lancets, reads:

In memory of Thomas Henry Shepherd last Canon of the Collegiate Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Southwell who died MDCCCLXXIII aged XCIV

7. The window in the north wall of the Airmen's Chapel was 1898. It has two lights, but they show one picture: the Adoration of the Magi. The two roundels depict (a) the Magi seeing the star and (b) the Magi journeying towards Bethlehem

The dedication reads:

To the glory of God and in dear memory of Mary Maltby who died December 4th 1890 these windows are dedicated.

The three windows in St Thomas's Chapel are all by Kempe and Co:

8. In the East wall of the chapel, there is a two-light window, made in 1910, entitled The Visitation, showing the visit of Joseph and the Blessed Virgin to her cousin Elizabeth, who was to bear a son, the future St. John the Baptist. In the left-hand light Joseph is being greeted by Zechariah, whilst in the right-hand light Mary greets Elizabeth. The left-hand roundel shows the Annunciation to Zechariah, whilst the right-hand roundel depicts the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

9. In the North wall there are two lights to be read together, showing The Flight into Egypt (1907). On the left, the donkey bearing Mary and Jesus is attended by angels carrying lanterns, whilst on the right Joseph, with his staff in his hand, is leading the small party, accompanied also by angels bearing lanterns. The left-hand roundel shows the Annunciation to Joseph, whilst the one on the right shows the Holy Family resting during the journey into Egypt.

10. The third window, in the West wall is dated 1906 and depicts The Marriage at Cana. Once again there are two lights: the one on the right shows the guests at the feast, whilst on the left Jesus is sitting at table with his mother behind him. He is pointing at the stone jars, which a servant is filling with water. The left-hand roundel shows St John the Baptist recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, whilst the right-hand roundel is a representation of the Baptism of Christ. Jesus stands in the River Jordan and John anoints his head, pouring water from a shell.

The Kempe windows in the south quire aisle and the south nave aisle. The subject matter of these two windows is very different from the other Kempe windows in the Minster. Whilst the others illustrate stories from the New Testament, mainly stories connected with the Nativity of Christ, the remaining two show: in the nave, the Three Archangels and in the quire, the Two Dragon Slayers (St Michael and St George).

Many more Kempe windows can be seen in Hucknall St Mary Magdalene, which has more Kempe windows than any other in the country.